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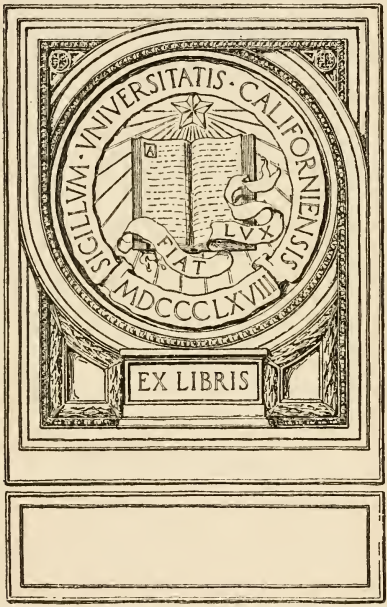
The West of England Woollen Industry — under Protection — and under Free Trade

BY

DOROTHY M. HUNTER

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1910

GIFT OF
Robert Hunter



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GIFT OF MR. ROBERT HUNTER

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PAGE

Merits of Free Trade must be judged by general advantage to community, not by progress of any single industry 7

CHAPTER I

THE INDICTMENT OF THE PROTECTIONIST

Tariff Reformers cite closing of mills as condemnation of our Fiscal Policy—The appeal to isolated instances unfair 10

CHAPTER II

THE WEST OF ENGLAND CLOTH TRADE

Establishment and early progress of the industry largely due to foreign immigrants—Failure of restraints upon trade to avert serious depression in the seventeenth century—Progress in the eighteenth century . . . 13

CHAPTER III

FROM OLD METHODS TO NEW

Gradual substitution of machinery for hand-labour—Adoption of Free Trade—Alleged failure of the policy—Evidence given before Tariff Commission—Not from the more important or progressive firms . . . 19

CHAPTER IV

UNDER PROTECTION

Acute depression of the West of England woollen industry during the heyday of Protection—Depression throughout the country—Distress of the workers—Protection, causing high price of provisions and other necessaries, the main cause of depression and unemployment—Decline in export trade 26

CHAPTER V

GENERAL PROGRESS OF THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY UNDER FREE TRADE

General progress of woollen and worsted industries—Increased consumption of wool—Growth of exports—Effect of foreign tariffs—Less damaging to us than to our Protected rivals 38

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CHAPTER VI

Progress in the West Under Free Trade

PAGE

Progress less than in Yorkshire, but this no evidence of decline—Reasons why fewer hands employed—Improvement of machinery—Concentration of industry into hands of a few firms has caused closing of smaller mills 44

CHAPTER VII

Why Mills Have Closed

Due to home and not to foreign competition—Changes of fashion, particularly substitution of worsted for woollen fabrics, have favoured the Yorkshire at expense of the West of England industry—Manufacturers who have adapted themselves to changing conditions prosper—Great progress of the Wellington industry—French woollen districts, similar to West of England, have suffered similar fate 50

CHAPTER VIII

Condition of the Workers

Great rise in wages during Free Trade period—Fall in prices—Improved standard of living 61

CHAPTER IX

Probable Effects of Tariff Reform

No prospect of increased markets abroad—Retaliation a failure wherever practised—Injurious effect on home trade of (*a*) increased cost of materials of industry, (*b*) reduced purchasing power of consumers through general rise in prices 68

CHAPTER X

Rise of Other Industries

Workers released from woollen industry by labour-saving machinery have found other employment—Rise of various industries in neighbourhood of Gloucestershire woollen mills—Notably of engineering works . . 74

CONCLUSION

Summary and general considerations 81

THE WEST OF ENGLAND WOOLLEN INDUSTRY UNDER PROTECTION AND UNDER FREE TRADE

INTRODUCTION

Before we proceed to deal with the West of England cloth trade as affected by Free Trade and Protection respectively, we would emphatically urge that the case for Free Trade does not depend on the progress or decline of any particular industry in any particular locality, but on the general increase of wealth, power, and happiness which accrues to a community as a result of the exchange of goods and services between itself and the world at large. It were no matter of concern if not one single yard of cloth were woven in Gloucestershire, provided that at the same time the people were better clothed than when they made their own cloth and equally well supplied with other necessaries and comforts. Less wheat is grown in England to-day than when the Corn Laws were in operation, yet far more wheat is eaten, a greater population is far better fed.

We protected agriculture, we encouraged the growing of food on our own soil, and we starved. We abandoned the protective policy, we allowed thousands of acres to go out of wheat cultivation, and we are well fed. Our labour is more productively employed, because free to develop national aptitudes where it formerly strove against natural limitations.

It cannot be too often emphasised that the end and aim

of all labour is the production of wealth, and that that community employs its labour to the greatest advantage which obtains in return for it, directly or indirectly, the greatest amount of wealth. Every invention of human ingenuity in the field of agriculture, industry, or commerce has as its ultimate object, not the mere employment of labour, without regard to the product, but the increase of the fruitfulness of labour.

The gigantic and intricate machinery of modern trade has no other object than to increase the wealth-production of the world by encouraging the most profitable development of the natural resources and aptitudes of every individual, land, and people. The most profitable development of individual or national resources is only possible where individuals and nations can exchange with one another the products of their labour.

As a man finds his true vocation he gradually abandons other pursuits, and as a community discovers what are, at any given time, the most profitable branches of industry in which its labour can be employed, it gradually withdraws labour from those employments that are less profitable. Change is an essential element in progress, and vitality is shown rather in the rapidity with which men seize new opportunities and adapt themselves to new conditions than in the tenacity with which they cling to an old routine. Thus we may often see the decline of a particular industry in a particular locality side by side with an increase in the general prosperity of the district.

If the dying industry be replaced by another, or by others more profitable, and the community is thus better enabled to supply its wants, the change will be a sign of vitality, not of decay. This applies equally to the gradual migration of an industry from one district to another which offers greater natural advantages for its development.

There may be some wastage of labour and capital attendant on the initial stages of the change, but the tem-

porary loss will be insignificant in comparison with the ultimate gain. Changes such as these indicated are encouraged by Free Trade, and serve not to condemn, but to justify that policy.

If, on the other hand, an industry declines through want of adaptability, through indolence, or inefficiency, and is not replaced by another, equally or more profitable, this is indeed a misfortune. With less goods to offer, the community will have less power to buy, and the people must either eke out a precarious existence at a reduced standard of living, or must migrate in search of better fortune elsewhere. But, in a case of this nature, the disadvantage to the general community of encouraging industrial sloth and incapacity, by protecting the inefficient from outside competition, is too obvious to require emphasis. It is no less disadvantageous to the community to protect the most efficiently conducted industry, if, owing to natural causes, that particular industry can be carried on at a greater advantage elsewhere.

The more clearly we realise these truths the more clearly we shall see the folly of appealing to dying industries as arguments in favour of a return to Protection. When any industry is seen to decline as the direct result of the increasing import of foreign goods the fact is *prima facie* evidence: First, that we are able to obtain by exchange more of the particular article than we could formerly make for ourselves; second, that we are able to pay for the foreign goods by some other goods or services given in exchange.

A decline in one department of industry, where it is in fact due to increasing imports, is necessarily accompanied by an expansion in some other department, by an increase in goods made to pay for these imports, with the net result that we get a greater return for our labour. It were folly to hinder so desirable a change. Yet this is exactly what Protection accomplishes. The Corn Laws were designed

to prevent a decline in the cultivation of wheat in this country; their effect was to starve our people and to effectually check the natural expansion of our manufacturing industries by preventing the exchange of British manufactures for foreign corn—a fact strikingly exemplified in the history of the West of England cloth trade during the period of Protection.

CHAPTER I

THE INDICTMENT OF THE PROTECTIONIST

THE Stroud Valleys, which may aptly be called the rural-industrial district of Gloucestershire, are often cited by the enemies of Free Trade as a proof of the decay of British industry under the baneful influence of an antiquated fiscal system.

This beautiful district, a West Riding in miniature, but smokeless and softened by the breath of the South, has for centuries been a centre of the famous "West of England" cloth trade. From the early youth of the industry until the early years of the last century, West of England cloths from the looms of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, or Somerset reigned supreme, not only in our own country, but in the markets of Europe.

But with the 19th century came an age of industrial revolutions, and the cloth trade was the subject of mighty changes. The hand loom disappeared from the weaver's cottage, replaced by the power loom at the mill; in every direction machinery, power-driven, superseded hand labour; and, as the steam engine took the place of the water-wheel, the cost of coal, proximity to coalfields, be-

came for the first time an important consideration for manufacturers.

Later came great changes in the popular demand for cloths. The old-fashioned broadcloths, the superfines for which the West of England still remains unrivalled, declined from universal favour. The new demand was for a great and constantly changing variety of tweeds and of worsted suitings and serges.

The situation of Yorkshire, within easy access of coalfields, gave an immense impetus to her industries from the very commencement of the industrial revolution; the subsequent changes in fashion gave her an opportunity of which she was not slow to avail herself, and she rapidly became pre-eminent, not for the production of the finest cloths of the highest value, but for her capacity to meet rapidly and cheaply the new demand. West of England manufacturers found themselves face to face with a new order of things: a restricted demand for their specialities and formidable competition in other lines.

The struggle which ensued has resulted in the survival of the fittest. Enterprising firms have adapted themselves to changed conditions, taken a new lease of life, and built up flourishing and progressive concerns; but the weaker or more conservative have one by one dropped out of the race, and been obliged to close their mills.

The history, here briefly sketched, was set out more fully, a few years ago, in an article in the Commercial Supplement of the *Times*, appearing on December 19th, 1904.

This article opened with the statement that "seldom has a year passed of late without one or more firms dropping out of existence, and the mills have either been used for other industries or have become untenanted and dilapidated ruins."

That was the feature which impressed itself upon the imagination of Tariff Reformers. Probably many read

the article no further, and ignored the fact that, among the causes of the alleged decline, foreign competition was barely even mentioned.

To a Protectionist, to whom change, that essential companion of growth, is abhorrent, a mill no longer used for its original purpose stands as a complete and irrefutable condemnation of our Free Trade policy.

The Tariff Reformer espies a disused mill, a smokeless chimney, a piece of silent machinery—these may be difficult of access, antiquated, obsolete; builders may be busy in the erection of modern plant and buildings a few miles distant; still the Tariff Reformer will point to the closed doors, the broken windows, the mossy water-wheel as emblems of the decay of British industry due to the unchecked invasion of our markets by the wicked foreigner. "Revert to Protection," he urges, "and these mills, which you remember filled with busy hands, and echoing to the hum and clatter of machinery, which now stand silent and deserted, will again throb with life and activity, and bring good wages into many homes."

This appeal to isolated instances and local interests is misleading and dangerous. But there are large numbers among both employers and workpeople who find great difficulty, even where they have the inclination, in looking beyond the narrow horizon of their more immediate affairs. An employer who, from whatever reason, finds it increasingly difficult to sell his goods, is naturally prone to listen to those who offer to place obstructions between his customers and his competitors. Too often he accepts the offer without any serious attempt to weigh its merits or examine its attendant drawbacks and especially its effect upon the community at large. The wage earner has far scantier opportunities than has his master for gaining a broad view of economic questions. He has perhaps seen mills closed not far from him and his neighbours thrown out of work; he is haunted by the dread of unemployment. He has

small means of judging what are the real causes of failure near at hand, and often knows comparatively little of the rising prosperity of other districts.

We hope in the following pages to show, that West of England woollen cloths still enjoy, by reason of their excellent quality and finish, a proud position in the markets of the world, while several firms in the West are engaged in a rapidly expanding trade in the better class of worsteds; that the present condition of the workers is better than it has been at any previous time within living memory; that, as a rule, where there has been decline or failure, this has been due to causes other than foreign competition; that many of the mills in the West of England which have ceased to be used as cloth mills are now put to equally or more profitable use; and, finally, that a reimposition of protective duties, while it might possibly prove a temporary benefit to a limited number of certain local industries, would do so at the expense of others and at great cost to the community at large.

CHAPTER II

THE WEST OF ENGLAND CLOTH TRADE

THE art of cloth-making, for long one of the staple industries of these islands, was originally brought to us by foreign invaders, alien refugees, and immigrants. The Romans, it would appear, taught their British subjects to spin and weave; our Norman conquerors brought with them numerous artisans from Flanders, who gave a great impetus to the industry. We learn from Sir Matthew Hale, of Gloucestershire, that in the reigns of Henry II.

and Richard I. "this kingdom greatly flourished in the art of manufacturing woollen cloth," and, according to Madox's "History of the Exchequer," Gloucester was among the towns that "paid fines to King John for license to buy and sell dyed cloth as they were accustomed to do in the time of Henry II." The trade, however, appears to have been almost completely lost during the wars and turmoils of succeeding reigns until the time of Edward III., when it was revived by the intervention of that astute monarch. At that time wool from this country was largely exported to the Netherlands, to be there manufactured into cloth. "The King and State," so says Fuller, the Church historian, "began now to grow sensible of the great gain the Netherlands got by our wool, in memory whereof the Duke of Burgundy not long after instituted the 'Order of the Golden Fleece,' wherein, indeed, the 'Fleece' was ours, the 'Golden' theirs, so vast their emolument by the trade of clothing. Our King therefore resolved, if possible, to reduce the trade to his own country, who as yet were ignorant of that art, as knowing no more what to do with their wool than the sheep which wear it, as to any artificial and curious drapery—their best clothes then being no better than friezes, such their coarseness for want of skill in the making."

Edward sent emissaries over to the clothworkers of the Netherlands to tempt them with fair promises of improved fortune to bring their industry over to this country. These emissaries, Fuller tells us, "represented to the journeymen their hard condition—early up and late in bed, and all day hard work and harder fare (a few herrings and mouldy cheese). Here they should feed on fat beef and mutton till nothing but their fullness should stint their stomach." They should, moreover, marry English wives of good station and "such the English beauties that the most curious foreigners cannot but commend them." These allurements were successful in attracting the Dutch and Flemish

workmen to our shores in considerable numbers and with the happiest results.

"Happy the yeoman's house into which one of these Dutchmen did enter, bringing industry and wealth along with them; such as came in strangers within doors soon after went out bridegrooms, and returned sons-in-law; and those yeomen in whose houses they harboured soon became gentlemen, and gained great estates to themselves."

These highly desirable immigrants were established in various parts of the country. "It was judged best, in order to prevent, on any discontent, a general resolution of returning, and to diffuse the benefits of their art over the kingdom, to disperse them into different and remote counties, that they might establish in each different manufactories." The making of fustians was set up in Norwich; of baize at Sudbury, in Suffolk; of broadcloths in Kent; of kerseys in Devonshire; of friezes in Wales; of Halifax cloths in Yorkshire; of cloth in Hampshire, Berkshire, Sussex, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and at Kendal, in Westmorland; and of serges at Colchester, in Essex, and at Taunton, in Somerset.*

In several localities, notably in the West of England, the particular character given to the industry by these Flemish settlers has been to a great extent preserved throughout the intervening centuries. Wellington, next door to Taunton, is to-day famous for its serges, while fine cloths have been the speciality of the Gloucestershire industry ever since the days when "a prime Dutch clothmaker in Gloucestershire received the surname of 'Web,' given him by King Edward there."

In the reign of Elizabeth the industry again received a considerable impetus from foreign immigrants. Among the Huguenot refugees and among the Dutch Protestants, who fled from the persecutions of the Duke of Alva, were

* *See* Toulmin's "History of Taunton."

many skilled artisans, who introduced improvements in manufacture and new varieties of cloth. It is certain that these foreign refugees, who were attracted to our shores by the liberty of conscience they could enjoy here, contributed far more to the progress and development of our woollen industry than the various restrictive measures, arbitrary in character, and often barbarous in their severity, passed by our legislature from time to time for the supposed advantage of the industry.

By an Act passed in the reign of Elizabeth the exportation of sheep or wool was prohibited under pain that the offender should forfeit all his goods for ever, and should, after one year's imprisonment, "in some market town, in the fullness of the market, on the market day have his left hand cut off, and to be nailed up in the openest part of the market. And for the second offence shall be adjudged as a felon."

This inhuman measure remained upon the statute book until late in the 18th century. There were at the same time heavy taxes on the import of foreign wool; a tax of 6d. per pound was not repealed until 1824. The use of indigo as a dye was also at one time prohibited under heavy penalties. Heavy import duties on finished cloths were also enforced from time to time.

The solicitude of governments did not, however, save the woollen industry from a long period of profound depression during the 17th century. Wars abroad, strikes at home, instability, unrest and oppressive legislation almost destroyed the trade during the reigns of the Stuarts and of the Commonwealth. It is said that in 1665 2,000 manufacturers and artificers left the country at one time under Thomas Pelham, of Warwick. In Toulmin's "History of Taunton" we read that "the war with Spain, breaking out in 1665, operated greatly to the disadvantage of the woollen business." "Such was the effect of that war that 'trade' (says my author), long since complained of to be dead,

is now lamented generally as buried, though hereafter it may have a resurrection."

So great was the depression during the reign of Charles II. that Parliament, in desperation, enacted (a grim attempt to revive the industry) that all persons should be buried in woollen shrouds.

In 1667 Sir Josiah Child, a man more enlightened than his fellows, wrote advocating as the best means of encouraging the industry, a repeal of all laws restraining freedom of manufacture. But he was in advance of his time.

A revival of the trade began as soon as the accession of William and Mary brought internal peace to the country, a revival which in the Western counties appears to have been maintained throughout the following century.

The trade of Taunton appears to have reached its zenith in the early years of the 18th century; it is stated that in 1704 8,500 persons were weekly employed in making its cloths. Subsequently, the people of Taunton, from purely local causes,* allowed the trade gradually to slip through their fingers into the more tenacious grasp of competitors both in the adjacent countryside and in other parts of the kingdom.

* "The trade of Taunton is now reduced to a low ebb. Houses in the suburbs have fallen into ruins and been destroyed, and the number of inhabitants greatly decreased; while the woollen manufacture in other places, and in the North particularly, has flourished. The decay of it here must be therefore sought in causes that have had a local operation.

"Contested elections, by no means friendly to industry, must have proved particularly prejudicial to a trade, which, at times, could admit of no delay in the executions of orders for goods that must be ready for the sailing of ships and the seasons of foreign fairs. The mischief of their influence in this respect was particularly felt in the continued and violent opposition of the year 1754. The demand for its goods was then great; but through the idleness and debauchery of the season it could not be answered. The orders being returned to the merchants were sent for execution to other towns, with which intercourse, being

The Gloucestershire branch of the industry made good progress throughout the 18th century. The great natural advantages offered by the Cotswold hills and vales had early attracted the industry to that part of the county, and it was there that it grew and prospered. In 1555, by an Act of Parliament which was otherwise designed to confine the manufacture of cloth to large towns, special permission was given to the towns and villages in the neighbourhood of the Stroud Water to "use and exercise the feat or mystery of making, weaving, or rowing of cloth out of a city, borough, or market town." This special permission was given in consideration of the fact that large numbers of cloth workers were then, as they were for nearly three centuries following, scattered widely over a considerable area; many weavers living in lonely cottages or little hamlets nestling in the folds of the hills, while a large number of little mills stood dotted along the streams that drain the western portion of the range into the Severn Valley. These swift, clear streams afforded a constant and abundant supply of water for the scouring, fulling, and dyeing processes, and at the same time provided motive power for such primitive machinery as was employed before the introduction of steam power. Tradition says that the quality of these waters was also of peculiar excellence for dyeing purposes. However this may be, it is certain that the neighbourhood was, from early days, celebrated for the brilliance and permanence of its dyes, and the finest scarlets and hunting cloths still come from these valleys. The hills afforded good pasture for sheep, so that a large local supply of wool

thus opened, was continued. But the decline of the Taunton trade must also be ascribed, in a great degree, to the advantage which the manufacturers in the North have derived over us from the introduction and use of spinning machines, which would have been particularly useful here, not only to secure the exact and true execution of this part of the trade, but to supply the want of hands in conducting it, which for a number of years was very sensibly felt."—From Toulmin's "History of Taunton."

was available, an advantage of no small importance in early days, when cloth manufacturers relied exclusively or mainly upon English wool. Spanish "merino" (wool from overseas) was not introduced into the manufacture until towards the end of the 17th century, when its superior fineness began to be recognised, and it was then and for long afterwards used together with home-grown wool. It was not till the 19th century that Colonial wool was imported into this country in any considerable quantities. It has now entirely superseded English wool for the manufacture of the finer woollen cloths. The best superfine cloths are made from merino from Silesia and East Prussia, but Australian wool provides the main supply of raw material to the Gloucestershire mills at the present time.

CHAPTER III

FROM OLD METHODS TO NEW

At the opening of the 19th century the West of England cloth trade, which had attained to so excellent a fame, was still carried on under very primitive conditions.

It was, to a great extent, a home industry. There were manufacturers who carried on a considerable business without possessing any mill at all. A warehouse and office were all that they required; each process of manufacture was in its turn carried out in the scattered homes of the workers, and the work returned into the masters' hands, only to be examined, passed, and given out to the next set of workers. Combing, spinning, and weaving were all done by hand in the workers' houses. The initial cleaning and picking of the wool was done by women,

who, "standing around a wattle hurdle, placed tablewise, and each armed with a long willow rod in either hand, beat on the wool spread out before them, till the locks of wool were disentangled and the dust shaken out; this was real hard work, and in hot weather required them to strip to it." * How astonished would these poor women be, if they could step to-day into a modern mill and watch the gigantic scouring and drying machines easily disposing of bales of wool under the leisurely eye of two or three labourers!

After the weavers had returned their work it was again given out to women to be burled—that is, mended and the knots removed—and only the finishing processes, the milling and dressing, dyeing, and final scouring, were performed at a mill. Even the shearing of the cloth after dressing was at this time done by hand shears.

The transition from the home to the factory, from handicraft to machine work, seems to have taken place somewhat more slowly in the West of England than in the North. In Toulmin's "History of Taunton" we read: "The decline of the Taunton trade must be ascribed in a great degree to the advantage which the manufacturers in the North have derived over us from the introduction and use of spinning machines." The introduction of machinery certainly seems to have been encouraged with some reluctance by masters and to have met with great opposition by the men.

Thomas Fox, the first of that name to join the firm known to-day as Fox Bros. and Co., of Wellington, insisted, in 1796, upon introducing into the works the newly invented throstles for worsted and jennies for spinning yarn; but so alarmed were all his elder partners at the intended innovation that they retired in a body. The following conversation is handed down by family tradition:

* Lecture delivered by Mr. Charles Playne, woollen manufacturer, at Nailsworth, near Stroud, 1871.

"Thomas, it will never do at all; we shall have our places burnt about our ears." "Uncles," replied the younger man, "you have made your fortunes. I have mine to make, with a young family coming on; you must let me have my way." It is fortunate for the people of Wellington that the progressive spirit of this innovator has been preserved by his successors up to the present day. The firm is now the largest and probably the most perfectly equipped in the West of England woollen trade.

The introduction of the first shearing machine into a Gloucestershire mill in the early years of the 19th century met with bitter opposition on the part of the workmen, as the following letter will testify:—

"WHITEHALL, October 12th, 1802.

"WHEREAS it has been humbly represented to the KING that an anonymous threatening letter has been addressed to Messrs. PAUL and NATHANIEL PEACH WATHEN, Woollen-Manufacturers of Woodchester, in the county of Glocester, of which the following is

"A COPY, *viz.*,

"'For Paul Wathen

"'WoodChester near Strouds Water

"'Glocester Shear.

"'Paul Wathen You Hare a Damd in Fernald Scoundrel & We will Teack yuir Damd Life from you if Dont Teack care of yuirself. And Wee Hear in Formd That you got Shear in mee sheens and if you Dont Pull them Down in a Forght Nights Time Wee will pull them Down for you Wee will you Damd infernald Dog.

"'And Bee four Alamighty God We will pull down all the Mills That heave Heaney Shearin me Shens in Wee will cut out Hall your Damd Hearts as Do Ceep Them and Wee will meack the rest Heat them or els Wee will searve them the Seam.

"'Thear Read This and Weep Do you For your Time is but Shourt Hear your Damd Villian Raskell.'

"His Majesty, for the better apprehending and bringing to Justice the Persons concerned in writing and sending the Letter above mentioned, is hereby pleased to promise His most gracious Pardon to any one of them (except the Person who actually wrote the said Letter) who shall discover his or their accomplice or Accomplices therein, so that he, she, or they may be apprehended and convicted thereof. "Pelham."

"And, as a further Encouragement, a Reward of

ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS

Is hereby offered by the said Messrs. Wathen to any Person making such Discovery as aforesaid (except as in before excepted), to be paid on the Conviction of any One or more of the Offenders."

The process of carding was the first in which hand labour was very generally superseded by machinery. The original hand-card was a small wooden-backed brush set with teazle-heads; after a time the teazles were replaced by short wires driven through leather or cloth. Later this wire-studded cloth was fitted on to a series of rollers, between which the wool passed as through a mangle. The rude machine thus constructed, driven by horses or water power, was that commonly in vogue at the beginning of last century. The modern carding engine works on the same principle, and is an elaboration of the original machine.

The growing use of machinery soon necessitated the erection of mills. In the Stroud valleys many mill buildings are still in use which date from the early years of the 19th century. One of the largest mills in the district, a handsome and imposing pile of red brick now belonging to the firm founded by Sir Samuel Marling, was built about the year 1813. The majority of the old mills are of more modest proportions, and built of the stone of the country.

Steam engines appear to have been introduced into Gloucestershire mills about the year 1815. They were for a long time used to supplement water power during the summer months only, but in consequence of their superior power and greater regularity of action they gradually superseded the water-wheel, which is now relegated to the rôle of an occasional auxiliary.

In the Somerset mills the introduction of steam power was later than in Gloucestershire. At one important mill, at Twerton, near Bath, the waters of the Avon still provide the main motive power.

The weaver was the last of the cloth workers to be driven into the factory. Many men still living remember the days of the old hand-loom weaver; remember seeing him carrying his work to and from the mill, or hearing the cheerful clatter of his loom as they passed by his cottage. On the Cotswold Hills there are hundreds of cottages containing a room a little larger than was customary in the ordinary cottage of the day, and lighted by a broad window. These rooms were built to accommodate the loom which was the means of livelihood of its owner. Not infrequently a cottage contained two looms, several members of the family assisting in the work. There were also many master weavers, each with a small workshop, where sometimes as many as half a dozen apprentices or journeymen were employed.

About the year 1830 the manufacturers began to fit up weaving sheds of their own, where the work could be done under their supervision. This led to the introduction of the power loom, which finally displaced the old weavers. The change was, however, made gradually. In Gloucestershire certain cloths were still frequently woven by hand in the 'fifties; at Wellington it was not until 1852 that a power loom was used.

With the general adoption of the power loom and the introduction of combing machinery by the Somersetshire

serge manufacturers, about the year 1856, the final stages were accomplished in the concentration of the woollen industry in the factory, and the substitution of mechanical for muscular force in every department of the industry. It remained to improve and elaborate the machinery brought into use. That was the work of the latter half of the 19th century, a work which still continues, and which has probably already accomplished as much in increasing the productive power of labour as did the original transition from hand labour to the use of machinery. The hand loom differs less from the first simple power loom on which the broad cloths of the West of England were woven than does the latter from a modern fast fancy loom, with its many harnesses and its shuttle flying back and forth to every tick of the clock.

INTRODUCTION OF FREE TRADE

From the first year to the last the 19th century was a period of rapid change in industrial methods.

It was when midway through this period of transition that the country boldly adopted the experiment of Free Trade. So satisfactory were the results, that for fifty years the wisdom of the policy was not seriously challenged. But to-day, through the length and breadth of the land, the Tariff Reformer asserts that the experiment has proved a failure, that it is bringing about the gradual annihilation of our industries, is driving our capital into foreign lands and our labour into unemployment.

"Wool is threatened," said Mr. Chamberlain at Greenock in October, 1903; and although wool, in common with the other threatened industries, proceeded during the next few years to enjoy a period of unparalleled prosperity, the refrain has been eagerly taken up and re-echoed ever since by every advocate of Protection from John o' Groats to Land's End.

The West of England cloth trade has received its full

share of commiseration and nervous solicitude from these premature mourners. The *Stroud News*, some three years ago, under the heading "Disastrous Effects of Unfair Foreign Competition—What Well-known Manufacturers Say," published an article in which the opinion is freely expressed that hostile tariffs abroad and foreign competition at home are ruining the West of England mills, and that "if the present state of things is to continue, it is easy to foresee the end."

It may be questioned whether constantly to assert that British goods cannot weather the competition of an open market is judicious in the interests of our foreign trade, whether it is an inducement to foreign customers to buy our goods.

As a matter of fact, the more progressive firms in the West of England are not afraid of foreign competition. In the home market the Yorkshireman is their formidable competitor; and even in foreign markets they often fear their British rivals more than the native manufacturer, although the latter be entrenched behind a tariff wall.

Among the men who are doing most to uphold and to enhance the reputation of West of England mills are many who are Free Traders, not only on general principles, but in the interest of their own industry. Their opinion should carry weight. Yet if we turn to the works of the Tariff Commission, that nominally authoritative collection of evidence, and laboriously search the volume on the woollen and worsted industries, we find not a word of evidence from Fox's, of Wellington, who, in their various mills, employ more than three times as many hands as any other firm in the West; not a word from any existing firm in the Stroud and Dursley Valleys, the chief seat of the industry. The Tariff Reform manufacturers there may endeavour to influence local votes by every means in their power, but they shrink from proclaiming to the world at large that they are in need of Protection. The only evidence from

the West of England to be found within the blushing covers of this voluminous publication, with the exception of one paragraph from a Gloucestershire firm which has since closed its doors, is from three firms in Trowbridge, one, at least, of which is in a very flourishing condition, and a few more scattered between Frome, Bath, and Buckfastleigh, in Devon.

In dealing with the statements of those who attribute to our present fiscal system any decline there may have been in recent times in the West of England cloth trade, and who assert that a return to Protection would prove the salvation of the industry, it will be well to consider what causes, other than foreign competition, have made the position of the industry difficult, and to inquire what was the condition of the West of England cloth trade during those years when we enjoyed to the full the benefits of a protective tariff. Was every mill working full time, every worker taking home good wages?

There are records of those days which point to a very different state of affairs.

CHAPTER IV

UNDER PROTECTION

In the census published in 1851, which gives the course of population during the preceding half century, on those pages which refer to the district embraced by the Stroud and Dursley Unions we find a striking record of diminution of population, uncompromisingly attributed to depression in the woollen cloth trade, the staple industry of the district, and consequent unemployment; a diminution

taking place between 1831 and 1851 during the heyday of Protection, and on so considerable a scale, that in 1851 the population of the Dursley district was less than it was in 1811.

We read in the marginal notes:—

North Nibley.—"A diminution of population has taken place owing to persons formerly employed in the woollen cloth manufacture having left to seek employment elsewhere."

Wotton-under-Edge.—"The failure of the woollen cloth manufacture is assigned as the cause of diminished population."

Uley.—"The decline of population in Uley is attributed to the decline of the woollen cloth manufacture in the parish."

Cam.—"The decline of the cloth manufacture at Cam has reduced the population, the inhabitants being obliged to seek employment elsewhere."

There are notes to the same effect respecting Dursley, Stinchcombe, Cowley, and Lingwood, every parish, in fact, in the Dursley Union, with the exception of three small agricultural villages.

In Uley, which at the beginning of the century was one of the most important centres of the industry, the population in 1851 was exactly half what it had been thirty years previously.

In the district included in the Stroud Union also a decline in population is recorded, more particularly in those parishes which most depended on the woollen industry. Here, as in the Dursley district, a great expansion, accompanied by a rapid rise in population, had taken place between 1811 and 1821, the combined result, doubtless, of the restoration of peace in 1815 and the steady progress in industrial methods. But from 1821 onwards little or no progress appears to have been made, and during the two following decades there was a marked set-back.

The population of the whole of the Stroud district was practically the same in 1851 as in 1821. In the sub-districts of Painswick, Rodborough, Minchinhampton, and Horseley it had sunk below that level, and in the Bisley sub-district had fallen to the level of 1811.

In every case of marked decline the census authorities attribute this decline to the "failure," "dulness," or "want of employment" in the clothing trade, which caused "the migration of many families"—some to the Colonies, some to other parts of the kingdom.

It may with justice be urged that the transfer of work from the cottage to the mill doubtless encouraged migration from the remoter upland villages, such as Pitchcombe and Edge above the Painswick road, or North Nibley nestling under the head of one of the many promontories that stand guard over the Severn Valley. But migration was as great from the well-watered valleys where mill after mill had grown up along the banks of the streams.

Was the introduction of machinery the prime cause of the want of employment? No. For not the workers only, but the masters with them, were sufferers. It is recorded by Mr. Timothy Exell,* a citizen of North Nibley, that "in a few years 143 woollen manufacturers failed in Gloucestershire alone, their establishments were broken up, their property sacrificed." Dunckley, in his "Charter of the Nations" (published 1854), gives a similar picture in the following paragraph:—

"At Frome, from 1831 to 1841, the population had considerably decreased; rents were 50 per cent. lower; one-sixth of the houses were unoccupied; and the only item of increase was the poor rate. Of Bradford,† Stroud, Uley,

* A Sketch of the Circumstances which providentially led to the Repeal of the Corn and Animal Food Laws and many Custom-House Restrictions. By Timothy Exell of North Nibley. Published 1847. Republished without alteration by R. A. Lister of Dursley, 1903.

† Bradford-on-Avon.

and Wootton the same tale could be told. Comparing the whole county of Gloucester at the two periods just mentioned, we find a diminution of 50 per cent. in the number of looms employed; and the number of manufacturers who still held their ground was less than the number of those who had failed during that short interval."*

Nor was the depression purely local, the result of a transfer of the industry from one to another portion of the kingdom. In other districts depending on loom and shuttle for their wealth, failure and unemployment were widespread.

"In the township of Leeds alone, and within four years, thirty-nine persons or firms connected with the woollen manufacture became bankrupt, with liabilities amounting, in the aggregate, to half a million sterling. To these we must add the failure of eighteen flax and tow spinners, sixteen machine makers, sixteen wool staplers, and nine stuff and worsted spinners, all of which occurred within the same time and in the same town. Six shillings and eightpence is above the average amount of the dividends which were paid on this enormous mass of insolvency; and the total loss accruing from these cases alone cannot be set down at less than a million sterling. In Bradford† one-fourth of the mills were idle, and the value of mill property had declined fully 30 per cent. So little machinery was wanted, that the wages of machine makers had fallen in five years to little more than one-half, and the trade itself seemed on the verge of extinction."‡

CONDITION OF THE WORKERS

The conditions then prevailing among the workers are scarcely conceivable to those who are acquainted only with the England of the present generation.

Timothy Exell, already quoted, stated in a petition to the Government presented in 1829 that "many industrious

* *See* "Trade and Tariffs," by J. M. Robertson, pp. 88, 89.

† Yorkshire. ‡ Dunckley.

British subjects were living on a shorter allowance of food than the felons in the county jail"—a statement confirmed by William A. Miles, subsequently deputed by a Royal Commission to inquire into the condition of the Gloucestershire weavers.

The *Edinburgh Review* in 1820 gives the following account of the condition of the workers:—

"In Lancashire, weavers are divided into different classes, and wages vary from 6s. to 12s. a week for fifteen hours' labour a day. They are nearly destitute of fuel and clothing; their bedding consists only of sacks filled with straw and chips; and their food is at once deficient in quantity and of the commonest and least nutritive kind."*

In Harriet Martineau's "History of the Peace," vol. ii., pp. 24, 25, we find the following passage, referring to the spring of 1826:

"There was such fearful suffering among the poor of the manufacturing districts, that . . . the people rose up against the power looms, which they believed to be the cause of their distress, and in one day every power loom in Blackburn and within six miles of it was destroyed. . . . It was a mournful spectacle in Lancashire that week in April, the mob going from town to town . . . snatching their food from bakers' shops and public houses; throwing stones at the soldiers and being shot down . . . leaping from two-storey windows to escape the soldiery, having cut up every web, and hewn down every stick and beam within; striking at their pursuers with table knives made into pikes; with scythes and sledge-hammers; swimming canals, hiding in woods, parading the streets of towns to the number of 10,000 at a time; frightening the night with cries of hunger and yells of rage. . . . In the first week in May the Manchester operatives rose again; and then the Bradford wool-combers and weavers met to consider the present unparalleled distress and

* *See* J. M. Robertson's "Trade and Tariffs," p. 78.

famishing condition of the operatives." About 12,000 weavers in Norwich were then unemployed. In another passage Miss Martineau records that:—

"At Leeds the pauper stone heap amounted to 15,000 tons; and the guardians offered the paupers 6s. a week for doing nothing rather than 7s. 6d. a week for stone breaking. The millwrights and other trades were offering a premium on emigration, to induce their 'hands' to go away. At Hinckley one-third of the inhabitants were paupers; more than one-fifth of the houses stood empty; and there was not work enough in the place to employ properly one-third of the weavers."

In Huddersfield the people did not on an average earn more than 2d. daily. In 1830 the manufacturing operatives of Lancashire and Yorkshire were, in many instances, receiving only 3d. and 4d. a day for more than twelve hours' labour.

It would be difficult to say which were the more pitiable—the sweated toiler who, working from dawn to dark, bore home a pittance that could buy for him neither food enough for nourishment nor clothing enough for decency, or the wild-eyed, homeless out-of-work who, in his desperation, begged, threatened, stole, broke windows, wrecked machinery, until the very weakness of starvation overcame its madness. Most terrible of all was the lot of the little children.

"But the condition of the children is chiefly calculated to excite sympathy and compassion. The necessities of their parents had occasioned them being employed in factories from their tenderest years; and at this moment a very large proportion of the half-starved children of the manufacturing districts are shut up for twelve or sixteen hours a day, to the irreparable injury of their health and morals, for a recompense of not more than 2s. or 3s. a week."*

* *See Edinburgh Review*, 1820, quoted in J. M. Robertson's "Trade and Tariffs," p. 78.

It is clear that the failure and bankruptcy, destitution and unemployment, which drove so many families of cloth workers from the Cotswold Valleys, were common to every one of our leading manufacturing industries in every part of the kingdom.

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

What was the cause? The immediate cause was the very evil of which our modern Protectionist complains. Want of markets. Want of sufficient profitable outlets for the produce of our mills and workshops. That was the immediate cause. Manufacturers could not sell enough of their goods either at home or abroad to keep their hands employed. But what was the cause behind the cause, the root of the whole matter? Why could not manufacturers sell their goods? Because our restrictive tariffs, our protective tariffs, artificially deprived millions of would-be customers, both within and without our own country, of the means of paying.

The foreigner could not buy our goods because taxes and prohibitions hindered him from selling his goods in exchange. In the home market, the special object of Protectionist care, prices ruled so high, as a result of these same taxes, that the purchasing power of the masses sufficed only for the barest means of subsistence. The Corn Laws raised the price of bread to such a point that in countless homes the entire earnings of the family could not buy a sufficiency of that one article of food; and where, by underfeeding, a few pence were withdrawn to meet the claims of other necessities, on that small sum, so pitifully saved, a heavy toll was levied by protective duties which artificially raised the price of almost every article of commerce. Thus, reduced demand at home and closing markets abroad produced unemployment; unemployment in turn yet further reduced the buying power of the poor. When, as in Bolton, 1,003 families possessed among them only 466 blankets, how could the blanket weavers hope to

work full time? When in turn the wages of the blanket weavers ceased, what was to become of the shopkeepers who had depended on their custom, and the manufacturers who had supplied those shops with goods?

The vicious circle was complete; it could only be broken by the liberation of our commerce from the network of restrictions which sought to render self-supporting a population that had already outgrown, both in number and in the multiplicity of wants arising with the advance of civilisation, the limited resources of their own country.

During the controversy which finally led to a measure of Free Trade, the Tariff was again and again proclaimed, by political fighters and by impartial inquirers alike, to be the main cause of depression and distress.

Speaking in the House of Commons on May 26th, 1840, Mr. C. P. Villiers said:—

"It is by the result of these and other silly and suicidal restrictions on the freedom of commerce that rivals are created, trade rendered languid, and industry cheated of its reward." And on March 15th, 1838, speaking in the same place: "At this very moment there are thousands of persons suffering the greatest privations from no other circumstance than from their trade having passed into the hands of foreigners. . . .

"In Nottingham, for instance, how many are enduring the greatest distress from the loss of the hosiery trade, of which they have been successfully deprived by the Germans? Indeed, it is a fact . . . that the Germans have not only ceased to demand the hosiery of this country —formerly an article of extensive import with them—and that they undersell us in every part of the world in this article, but that they undersell us in *Nottingham itself after paying a* 20 *per cent. duty* "—a fact which proves that Protection is not, as the Tariff Reformers would have us believe, an efficient "protection" against foreign "dumping."

Particularly significant in this connection is the evidence of the commission appointed in 1837 to inquire into the position of the unemployed hand-loom weavers of the United Kingdom. Their report was published in 1840, and is extensively quoted by Timothy Exell in the pamphlet already alluded to.

"It will be seen," he says, "that, with the exception of Dr. Mitchell, to whom Spitalfields and the Eastern silk district were confided, all our Assistant Commissioners found the Corn Laws denounced as the great cause of the existing distress, and their repeal or modification demanded as the first and most effectual remedy."

One of the Principal Commissioners, William Hickson, states (on p. 30 of his Report): "The high price of bread in the country is but one of the evils entailed upon the working classes by the Corn Laws; they have been met by retaliatory measures, affecting our commerce, by almost every nation in Europe and by the United States of America; through the influence of these measures our foreign trade, where it might at least have maintained itself, was lost. In 1820, cotton cloth exported to Russia was 13,203,851 yards; in 1837 it was 1,126,539 yards. Thus our trade has dwindled to almost nothing; and where it might have been almost unlimited, has been circumscribed in its operations. . . . Our Corn Laws have been met by duties, amounting in many cases to the practical exclusion of goods of British manufacture; these retaliatory measures have operated in a twofold manner to the injury of Great Britain and Ireland, by closing many ports against us; secondly, by encouraging the growth of foreign manufactures. That our Corn Laws are the apology for the high tariffs directed against British goods by foreign nations requires no proof." It may suffice here to allude to the note, written by the British Minister at Washington, Mr. Addington, to Mr. Canning on the subject of the tariff; he said: "I have only to add that

had no restrictions on the importation of foreign corn existed in Great Britain, the tariff would not have passed through either house of Congress."

Mr. William Barrett, of Newton Heath, Manchester, wrote, in a letter to Mr. Hickson quoted in the Report: "In the autumn of 1819, a time when there was much distress and discontent among the hand-loom weavers, Mr. John Bell, an agent from a respectable house in Hamburg, offered us an order for several kinds of goods which we were manufacturing; we accepted the order, of course, and I said, how do you pay? He replied: we pay in corn; in corn, I said, but the ports are shut; we cannot enter a single bushel for home consumption. . . . but if you cannot pay in money, cannot you send us something else? Can you send us linen yarn, which we could use? No, he replied, our warehouses are blocked up, full of corn, and we have nothing else to offer; though we are much in want of goods. I then said, we are very sorry to refuse such an offer at this time, for our weavers are not fully employed; but refuse it we must, for we can do nothing with corn. However, as we have gone so far, would you please to tell us at what price you would charge it? He then produced his memorandum of goods wanted, and written instructions, and showed that he was authorised to offer the best Baltic wheat, free at Hull, for 30s. 6d. the quarter; the average price at this time in England was 64s." In this instance the manufacturer lost a good order, and his weavers were left to starve—the result of Protection.

Mr. Hickson further quotes a German from Lübeck, who, in September, 1838, writes: "If your Corn Laws continue, it may be taken for granted that in ten or fifteen years there will be very little demand for English manufacture on the Continent. I cannot understand the policy of your Government, by which while you ruin us you injure yourselves. England is essentially a manufacturing country; we were agricultural,

and were content to pay you with our corn for your manufactures; now you refuse to take our corn; as we have nothing else with which to pay, you compel us to manufacture for ourselves. The policy you are pursuing is making the whole German people your rivals instead of your customers, which will cause a large portion of your industrial population to starve." He goes on to expostulate with the Government, and concludes by stating: "The price of wheat at Lübeck and Hamburg is, at this present time, in English money 40s. per quarter, whilst I see the price in Mark Lane is 72s. per quarter."

An opinion quoted by Mr. Keyser (Assistant Commissioner for the linen district of Yorkshire) thus summed up the situation: "If I make a piece of cloth, and meet a Frenchman with a sack of corn on his back, I should be glad to exchange. Up steps a Custom House officer, and will not let me; and I may eat my cloth if I can."

The reports of the other Assistant Commissioners all contain similar evidence.

Mr. Miles, Assistant Commissioner for the Gloucestershire district, says: "The Corn Laws are almost unanimously allowed to be the cause of distress." And Mr. Austin, Assistant Commissioner for the south-west of England, embracing Wilts, Somerset, and Devonshire: "The great and primary cause of distress is the want of sufficient trade to give employment to all; if we can find a remedy for this, the consequent evils will at once be removed, competition will cease, wages will rise, and still the profits of the capitalist will increase." What a familiar ring in these words! How often they fall to-day from the lips of Tariff Reformers! But Mr. Austin's report continues, "the only resource generally suggested is a repeal of the Corn Laws." No demand here for more Protection, but for Free Trade.

FALL IN EXPORTS OF WOOLLEN GOODS UNDER PROTECTION

During the period of Protection the annual value of our exports of woollen manufactures fell substantially, the first sign of recovery appearing after Peel's preliminary reform of the Tariff in 1842. The following figures are compiled from a table given in Porter's "Progress of the British Nation" (Section II., Chap. II., p. 168).

	Average Annual Value of Exports of Woollen and Worsted Manufactures other than Yarns
1815–19	£7,704,000
1838–42	5,665,000
1843–4	7,497,000

The loss of foreign trade was particularly felt in the class of goods manufactured in the West of England mills. The decline in total values may be attributed to some extent to lower prices of wool and economies in manufacture. But in many branches of the trade, and among them specialities of the West of England such as "cloths" and "napped coatings," there was a marked decline in quantities.

	Annual Average	
	Cloths of all Sorts Thousand Pieces	*Napped Coatings, Duffies, etc.*
1815–19	474	.. 82
1838–42	314	.. 17

"Kerseymeres," another West of England speciality, fell to less than one-third of their former value.

In face of these records of depression, failure, bankruptcy, loss of foreign trade, destitution and unemployment existing under a *régime* of rigid Protection, it would seem, quite apart from considerations of national welfare, little short of madness to suggest that a return to a similar system, even in a milder form, could benefit the cloth industry at the present day.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL PROGRESS OF THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY UNDER FREE TRADE

WITH the adoption of Free Trade a great impetus was given to the woollen and worsted industries. Their subsequent history has been one of continued progress and expansion. It will be well before inquiring to what extent the West of England has shared in this general progress to take a brief view of the industry as a whole. If the industry as a whole were languishing, national policy might be at fault; if the industry as a whole is prospering, then local vicissitudes must be due mainly to local causes.

Unfortunately no statistics exist which enable us to ascertain the actual output of our mills either at the present or in the past. Such tests, however, as are available all point to remarkable progress. The consumption of wool has largely increased, not only actually, but also relatively to the growth of population; our export trade has grown, and our people are better and more cheaply clothed. It is true that the numbers engaged in the woollen and worsted industries have not increased; but since the output is greater this is no matter for regret. It simply means that owing to improvements in machinery and manufacture a smaller proportion of the population suffices than was formerly the case to provide woollen clothing materials for the whole community plus a considerable surplus to be exchanged with the foreigner for other goods. There is a twofold gain to the community: our clothes are more abundantly and less expensively produced; we get them cheaper. And therefore, while more labour is set free to produce other goods, at the same time more money is set free to buy those goods. One result of the cheapening of cloth is a very great increase in the number of tailors and dressmakers employed in converting cloth into clothes.

INCREASED CONSUMPTION OF WOOL

The following figures, compiled from the Board of Trade Returns, show the increased consumption of raw wool, mohair, shoddy and mungo per head of the population, and also in proportion to the number of persons engaged in the woollen and worsted industries, between the years 1865 and 1908.

	Annual Averages.				
	Consumption of Sheep and Lambs' Wool.	*Net Imports. Alpaca, Llama, and Vicuna Wool and Goats' Wool.*	*Estimated Quantity of Wool from Imported Sheepskins.*	*Estimated Consumption of Rag-wool, Shoddy, etc.*	*Total Estimated Consumption of Wool, Mohair, Shoddy, etc.*
Years.	*Million lbs.*	*Million lbs.*	*Million lbs.*	*Million lbs.*	*Million lbs.*
1855-64	233	5.9	8.0	40	286
1865-74	312	9.2	17.9	74	413
1875-84	339	14.4	20.1	113	487
1885-94	422	21.3	28.6	109	581
1895-1904	472	29.9	31.6	138	672
1905-1908	485	38.3	34.8	190	748

	Total Estimated Consumption of Wool, Mohair, Shoddy, etc., per Head of Population.	*Annual Averages. Number of Persons Employed in Woollen and Worsted Industries according to Census Returns.*		*Approximate Number of lbs. Wool of all sorts consumed per Head of Persons Employed.*
Years.	*lbs.*	*England and Wales.*	*U. K.*	*lbs.*
1855-64	9.9	—	—	—
1865-74	13.2	—	—	—
1871	—	246,645	329,037	1,360
1875-84	14.1	—	—	—
1881	—	240,006	290,280	1,570
1885-94	15.5	—	—	—
1891	—	258,356	309,596	2,100
1895-1904	16.4	—	—	—
1900	—	286,106	—	—
1905-8	17.0	—	—	—

From Board of Trade Memoranda on British and Foreign Trade and Industry [Cd. 4954], 1909, pp. 162-163. The tables quoted are compiled from the Annual Statement of Trade and from tables compiled by the Bradford Chamber of Commerce.

It will be seen that the consumption of wool of all kinds per head of the population has increased by between 60 per cent. and 70 per cent. in fifty years. It is also interesting to note that the progress in industrial methods has been so great that in 1891 each worker could (on an average) deal with more than 50 per cent. more wool than twenty years previously.

EXPORT TRADE

With the introduction of Free Trade a great impetus was given to our export trade in woollen manufactures. It has been shown that during the period of Protection the value of our exports of woollen and worsted manufactures (other than yarns) stood, practically stationary, at about seven and a half millions. Twenty years later (1866) it had reached £21,000,000.

The abnormally high value of our woollen and worsted exports during the boom years (1870-73) were to a considerable extent the result of the high price of wool. In 1873 the price of British wool rose to 1s. 11d. per lb.; by 1879 it had fallen to 1s., and from that year until 1906 the price never rose even to that level. The great and constant fall in the price of both British and imported wools between the years 1874 and 1902 must be taken into account when we review the course of export values of woollen manufactures during that period.

Tariff Reformers frequently contend that, though Free Trade may have given an impetus to our industries when it was first adopted, and when, as they allege, we were easily pre-eminent as a manufacturing nation, the policy is unsuited to the circumstances of to-day; that foreign manufactures which have grown up behind the protection of tariff walls are now driving us from the markets of the world, and by invading our own defenceless markets are even ousting the British manufacturer from his own ground. In view of these oft-repeated statements it is

specially interesting to inquire what has been the course of our exports and imports of woollen and worsted goods during the last fifteen years, during which foreign tariffs have done their worst. The facts are reassuring.

	Average Annual Value in Thousand £	
	Net Imports	*Exports*
*1894–98	11,358	24,614
1904–08	10,457	30,093

Not only do we export nearly three times as great a value as we import, but our exports have grown, while imports have slightly diminished.

Moreover, the statement so frequently made that we are increasing our export of the lower grades at the expense of the more highly finished goods—and the statement is made most often in respect to the woollen trade—is without foundation. It is true that a considerable export trade in tops has grown up, but it has done so, not in place of, but side by side with, an increase in the export of woven and other finished fabrics, as the following figures show:—

	Annual Averages in Thousand £			
	1894–8		1904–8	*Increase*
Tops	1,139	..	2,643	= + 1,504
Yarns	6,520	..	6,990	= + 470
Manufactures other than Yarns ..	16,339	..	19,896	= + 3,557

Free Traders do not for a moment deny that hostile tariffs hinder our manufacturers from doing as great an export trade as they otherwise might do. Great injury was done to many manufacturers in the woollen and worsted trades in this country by the McKinley and the Dingley tariffs.

Our exports of woollen fabrics to the United States fell from £5,147,800 in 1890, the year before the McKinley Tariff came into force, to £3,178,000 in 1891, and from £3,545,400 in 1897 to £1,191,500 in 1898, the year after the prohibitive Dingley tariff was passed. No one can

* Statistical Abstract, 1894–1908.

feel any astonishment that a duty which compels the American consumer to pay £2 to £2 10s. for an article worth £1 should very often prevent him from buying that article. The astonishing thing is that in spite of duties of from 100 per cent. to 150 per cent. we still send (taking the average of the last five years) £1,360,000 worth of woollen and worsted tissues (exclusive of carpets, hosiery, and other miscellaneous fabrics) into the United States, while her Tariff-nurtured manufacturers are unable, even at a sacrifice, to dump their cloths upon our shores. Tariff Reformers contend that Protection, by securing the home market to manufacturers, enables them to enlarge their scale of production, and by that means so to reduce their cost that they can easily undersell the manufacturers of a Free Trade country on neutral as well as on protected ground. How is it, then, that the unprotected British manufacturer can send £1,360,000 worth of woollen and worsted piece-goods over the American tariff wall while the American, secure in the enjoyment of 100 per cent. to 150 per cent. of Protection, can barely send a thousand pounds' worth into our free market? So insignificant are our American imports of these goods (if, indeed, they exist at all) that they are included in the Board of Trade Returns with those from the unnamed "Other Foreign Countries," which in all amount to only £3,000.

The total value of the exports of woollen manufactures of all classes from the United States to all countries in the year ending June, 1906, was less than half a million sterling.

It may be argued that United States manufacturers have laboured hitherto under the disadvantage of having to pay a heavy tax on wool, and that taxes on raw material form (nominally) no part of the scheme of a scientific Tariff Reformer. Admitting that the American is specially handicapped by dear wool, what is the position of our other protected competitors? Are they beating us

out of the field in neutral markets? Does the security they enjoy behind their respective tariff walls enable them so to reduce their cost of production that they can undersell our manufacturers wherever they meet one another? And are their respective Governments able, by means of the bargaining power attributed to the policy of Retaliation, to obtain better tariff treatment for their goods than is enjoyed by our own defenceless manufacturers? A singularly forcible answer to these questions will be found in paragraphs 1547-8 of the Report of the Tariff Commission, Vol. II., Part 2, on the Woollen and Worsted Industries.

IMPORTS OF CLOTHS INTO UNITED STATES BY PRINCIPAL COUNTRIES.
Values: in thousand dollars.

Five Yearly Averages:	*United Kingdom*	*Austria Hungary*	*Belgium*	*France*	*Germany*	*All Countries*
1885–9	5,861	154	442	919	2,737	10,161
1890–4	9,231	92	454	692	2,072	12,563
1895–9	9,997	112	321	406	1,749	12,613
1900–4	3,032	102	147	248	1,039	4,584

N.B. The Dingley Tariff was introduced in 1897. The following figures for single years show its immediate and lasting effect:—

1897	13,058	179	465	447	2,836	17,007
1898	3,011	47	90	123	686	3,966
1899	2,676	79	136	241	764	3,909
1900	3,661	57	128	191	1,080	5,130
1901	2,650	66	85	261	895	3,968
1904	2,489	159	188	231	1,076	4,159

IMPORTS OF DRESS GOODS (WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S) INTO UNITED STATES FROM:
(Values in Thousand $)

Five Yearly Averages:	*United Kingdom*	*France*	*Germany*	*All Countries*
1885–9	6,418	7,508	2,675	16,649
1890–4	5,573	7,133	4,030	16,797
1895–9	4,453	4,073	4,016	12,612
1900–4	3,164	2,317	1,168	6,675
Single Years:				
1897	7,644	8,193	3,561	19,466
1898	2,047	3,795	2,707	8,581
1899	2,338	1,914	1,630	5,906
1904	4,456	2,562	1,135	8,206

It is a further tribute to the vitality of our industries that when a prohibitive tariff shuts us out of one market we at once increase our trade in other directions.

In 1890 the United States took 25 per cent. of our exports of woollen and worsted fabrics; she now takes less than 10 per cent. The custom which we have lost with her we have gained elsewhere. Our total sales of woollen and worsted fabrics were 18 per cent. higher in the five years 1904-8 than in the five years immediately preceding the imposition of the Dingley tariff.

In face of facts such as these it is idle to represent our woollen and worsted industries as in a languishing condition.

Here and there individuals have suffered acutely from adverse changes in foreign tariffs. It is hard for men so placed to look beyond their own case. But manufacturers in protected countries have suffered equally and more from the same causes; they have hit back, but it has availed them nothing. Their trade has suffered more than ours and recovered less easily. A general view of the industry must lead to the conclusion that it is in a more flourishing state in our own country than in any country where it is protected by a tariff wall.

CHAPTER VI

PROGRESS IN THE WEST UNDER FREE TRADE

A GENERAL survey of our woollen and worsted industries shows that the history of the industry under Free Trade has been one of varying but continued expansion culminating during recent years in a period of unparalleled activity.

If, therefore, there has been any decline in the West of England branch of the industry, that decline has been local and must be due to causes having a local operation.

Various circumstances have undoubtedly arisen which have favoured the expansion of the West Riding trade to the detriment of that of the Western counties, circumstances connected with situation, fashion, methods of production and other matters quite independent of the Tariff policy of our own or other countries. The West of England has not increased her trade in the same measure or proportion as has Yorkshire. According to the Census returns the West Riding accounted in 1861 for nearly 80 per cent. of the workers entered as engaged in the woollen and worsted industries in England and Wales; the West of England for about 8 per cent. In 1901 the West Riding accounted for 86 per cent., and the West of England for approximately 4 per cent.

In comparison with Yorkshire the West of England has lost ground. But what does this prove? It proves that of the enormous increase of business done under Free Trade, Yorkshire has taken the lion's share. It does not prove that there has been any actual decline in the West of England trade, still less does it prove that the West of England trade has been injured by our present fiscal system.

There are unfortunately no general statistics in connection with the West of England trade to enable us to ascertain accurately whether there has been actual progress or decline in the industry during the past half-century.

Such evidence as serves to test the progress of the industry as a whole is not procurable for separate districts. There are no records of the amount of wool retained for consumption in particular counties, no records of export trade, no authoritative means whatever of ascertaining the actual output of the mills of any particular district. The only statistical information available, that relating to

the number of persons entered in the Census returns as employed in the woollen and worsted industries, is of a nature which may very easily be misinterpreted. In the first place the Census classification of occupations has varied at different periods, so that the figures are not strictly comparable; some allowance must be made for the inclusion of certain classes in the earlier returns which are omitted from the later tables. Secondly, there has been a greater proportional decrease in the number of boys and girls under fifteen years of age than in the numbers of adult workers, a fact which indicates an improvement in the working conditions of the industry. Thirdly, and this is the main point, there has been a great saving of labour through the increased efficiency of machinery, in some important departments to so great an extent that one worker now suffices to do the work formerly done by three; in others the proportion is even larger.

The Census returns show a considerable decrease between 1861 and 1901 in the numbers employed in the West of England; in Gloucestershire a decline of about 50 per cent.; in Wiltshire 65 per cent., in Somerset 40 per cent. But it will be recognised that the causes of diminution already alluded to detract considerably from the significance of these figures as signs of an actual decline in the industry.

By far the most important of the causes tending to reduce the number of hands employed is the improvement of machinery which has so greatly increased the productive capacity of the individual worker that a very considerable fall in the numbers engaged in the industry is compatible with an undiminished or even an increased output.

A leading West of England manufacturer states that, according to the experience of his firm, a woollen spinner can spin twice as much yarn to-day as she could thirty years ago, a worsted spinner six times as much; in the

card-room each woman can handle nine times the amount of work she then handled. A weaver of serges or other plain stuffs thirty years ago had charge of two narrow looms running 70 picks a minute; to-day she works two wide looms running 131 picks a minute. The final width of stuff woven on the narrow looms was 31 inches; on the wide looms it is 56 inches. This increase of 85 per cent. in the pace of the loom, plus 80 per cent. in the width of the stuff, means, practically speaking, that one weaver can do the work formerly done by three. An automatic self-feeding loom is now being introduced for certain classes of work, which enables each weaver to take charge of four looms.

In the instances just quoted the increase of output per worker is somewhat greater than the average for the West of England, especially in the weaving department. In the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire mills, in the manufacture of what are properly known as West of England cloths—superfine blacks, navys, scarlets, billiard cloths, and other highly finished woollen cloths—it is not customary for a weaver to work more than one loom, and the better cloths cannot be satisfactorily woven at a high speed. But even in the finest class of weaving there has been an increase in speed. Some old looms, running only 40 to 45 picks a minute, are still in use in mills making a speciality of superfine cloths, but side by side with these the same cloths are being made at 60 picks; and, in addition, all the larger mills are furnished with fast looms for the weaving of serges, worsteds, etc. In scouring, carding, and spinning, and even in the finishing processes, there has admittedly been a great improvement in the productive capacity of the machinery employed, varying in degree between one mill and another, but general throughout the industry, and most marked in the mills employing the greatest number of hands, for those manufacturers who have had the foresight, courage, and capital to spend

most freely on renewing their machinery are those who have been most successful in increasing their business.

It is clear, therefore, that even a great diminution in the number of persons employed in wool manufacture in the Western counties should not alone be accepted as proof that less cloth is made there than formerly.

Neither does the fact that a certain number of mills have closed necessarily prove that the industry is, on the whole, declining. Tariff Reformers point to the closed mills as sure signs of decay, ignoring the while the greatly increased capacity of the mills that survive. "Forty businesses," so says one Stroud manufacturer, "have gone to the wall in forty years," while he does not remember to have seen one new business opened. Possibly; but he has certainly seen several very substantially enlarged. More than one among the leading Gloucestershire cloth mills working to-day has grown from insignificant proportions since the adoption of Free Trade by this country. One which did not employ 30 hands fifty years ago now employs from 350 to 400. The main part of the buildings belonging to this firm have been put up within twenty years, and extensions are still in course of construction. At nearly all the surviving Gloucestershire mills may be seen workshops or outbuildings erected within the last thirty years, and several among the first-class firms of the neighbourhood are increasing their business every year; two, to the knowledge of the writer, did a bigger business in the slump year of 1908 than they had ever done before. It is evident, then, that if some businesses have failed, others have greatly prospered, though there may have been no absolutely new business started. Where the trade was formerly in the hands of a large number of small firms, it is now concentrated in the hands of a small number of larger firms.

At Trowbridge, now the chief centre of the Wiltshire industry, a considerable portion of the mill buildings of

the leading firms are of comparatively recent construction, affording evidence of expanding business.

In Somersetshire the process of concentration has taken place in a yet greater degree than in Gloucestershire. Nearly four-fifths of the workers now engaged in the woollen and worsted industries in Somersetshire are employed by the well-known firm of Fox's, at Wellington, not a "new" business, certainly, for the firm already enjoyed a good reputation before the close of the eighteenth century. Its history has been one of steady expansion, and during the past forty or fifty years the progress made by this firm alone has more than counterbalanced any decline that may have taken place in the business done by other firms in the county. There is no room for doubt that the Somersetshire industry has prospered during the Free Trade period. The decrease in the numbers employed (and since 1881 there has been practically no decrease) has been more than balanced by the increased productivity of the machinery used, and a very substantial increase in output must certainly have taken place.

Whether the total output of the Gloucestershire mills has increased or declined is a moot point. The general consensus of opinion seems to be that the yardage turned out has remained about the same, but that the character of the trade has changed, the greatest demand to-day being for a less costly cloth than was formerly the case.

In Wiltshire the industry has probably declined since the 'sixties, but it appears to be in a thriving condition at the present time.

CHAPTER VII

WHY MILLS HAVE CLOSED

It is less immediately important to attempt to measure the actual progress of the industry than to discover the circumstances which hinder or which have hindered that progress. Are those circumstances a result of our fiscal system; would they be removed by Tariff Reform? Would a Protective Tariff around the British Isles have secured to the West of England wool manufacturers a larger share of the world's trade than they have in fact enjoyed? Would the imposition of such a tariff now improve their position in the future?

The answer that first suggests itself to these questions is that already given in a preceding chapter. When this country was protected by an exceedingly high tariff, including heavy duties on woollen goods, the West of England cloth trade was declining fast. Mills were closing, masters failing; workers, bereft of employment, were migrating at a rate never since equalled. Why? Largely because our Protective Tariff hindered the nations of the Continent from sending us their corn in exchange for our cloth, forced them to manufacture for themselves, and so converted them sooner than was natural from customers into competitors; and withal raised the price of necessaries to the British people to such a point that these, being prevented from buying cheap, were perforce compelled to buy little.

The difficulties of West of England woollen manufacturers under a system of Protection were without question to a great extent directly due to that system.

To what causes have their difficulties since the abolition of that system been mainly due? To causes independent of tariffs or of foreign competition.

If anyone desires to read a verdict on this matter from an impartial source, let him turn to the "Financial and Commercial Supplement" of the *Times,* for December 19th, 1904, where, under the heading "Decay of a Famous Industry: the West of England Woollen Trade," he will find an account of various reasons for the regrettable state of affairs suggested by the above lugubrious and certainly exaggerated headline.

The article, after drawing an all too gloomy picture of villages, once centres of cloth manufacture, "where the rhythmic beat of the loom-batten is heard no more," of towns where the "number of mills has dwindled down to a sadly small remnant," proceeds:—

"Many and varied are the causes given for the decay of this old-established industry, which until the last fifteen or twenty years was such a profitable one and allowed many of those engaged in it to amass large fortunes.

"Perhaps one of the chief causes was the fact that manufacturers made too much money in the good old days, which fact helped to lure them into a state of false security and prevented them from making that use of foresight and energy which is now so necessary to those engaged in any great industry.

"Undoubtedly the introduction of the worsted thread of yarn was the chief cause of the decline of the West of England trade. . . . There was some excuse for West of England manufacturers failing to realise the crisis, for at that time they were making as many of their goods as the capacity of the mills would admit, and had no difficulty in selling at practically their own prices. The worsted thread had, however, come to stay, and slowly but surely the West of England woollen trouserings and broadcloth were ousted by the smarter and more fancy makes in worsted from the North of England."

Referring to the constantly augmenting fickleness of fashion and demand for novelties, the article continues to

explain that this "necessitated the introduction of newer and quicker machinery, and in adopting this drastic change the West of England fell seriously behind their Yorkshire rivals." "As the demand for West of England goods became more limited, prices began to fall, profits to grow less, and some of the weaker firms commenced to drop out of the struggle for existence. Some of the manufacturers who had made large fortunes and acquired large landed estates retired to these, and took a good deal of capital with them, leaving others to carry on the industry with limited capital, which did not admit of the proper amount being spent on the languishing mills." Other factors in the "decline" of the industry are then given. They are: "Adverse Tariffs, shutting many manufacturers out of previously profitable markets"; the growth of clothing factories which provide the masses with cheap suits of shoddy material; craving for novelties and cheapness; imitation of better-class goods and designs by makers of shoddy cloths; unfair methods of some of the woollen cloth merchants, and lack of combination among the manufacturers for the protection of their interests against the merchants. "It is safe to say that if all the cloth which is *sold* as 'West' were woven and finished in that district, there would not be a single vacant mill or idle loom in the district."

The conclusion of the article is in brighter vein, stating that there are some very fine mills conducted on go-ahead lines; that "almost every variety of woollen and worsted cloths of the best and medium qualities is now made by some manufacturers in the West of England," and that "most of the finest and best cloth in the world is still turned out from West of England mills. Buyers come to London and other centres twice a year to buy these cloths, and in spite of a tariff of more than 100 per cent. duty the best traders in the United States and other high tariff countries insist on having the best goods, and these

are obtainable nowhere but in the West of England. . . . The history of the West of England woollen trade is that of some other British industries which have trusted too much to old methods and old reputations, and which are now being partly regenerated by the application of modern strenuous methods."

This article has been quoted at some length because on many points it reflects very fairly the views of those most intimately acquainted with the recent history of the West of England cloth trade, and also because its publication by the *Times* clears it from suspicion of any undue bias towards Free Trade. At the time of the publication of the article, the *Times* had already, for more than a year, been acting as herald-in-chief to Mr. Chamberlain in his campaign in favour of Tariff Reform; and though the commercial supplement, by retailing facts rather than opinions, preserves a reputation for impartiality, had it been possible to show that the West of England woollen trade had been ruined by foreign competition, this would doubtless have been done. There is, on the contrary, in the whole article not a single reference to foreign competition in the home market, and only one passing mention of "adverse foreign tariffs" as one among many circumstances adversely affecting the industry.

The fact is that in the class of trade done by West of England mills foreign competition at home is so insignificant as to be a negligible quantity. The Gloucestershire manufacturers frankly admit this. They admit that practically no foreign goods come into this country of a kind and quality to compete with their time-honoured cloths, or even with the good-class woollen and worsted stuffs which they are now making. There is indeed but little competition, even from other parts of our own country, in the cloths which have given to the West of England mills the high reputation they enjoy. Professor Clapham, in his interesting review of the woollen and

worsted industries,* says that some of these mills "turn out the finest woollen cloth in the world," and that in woollens the West Riding "has never won a reputation for such fine workmanship as that of the Tweed towns or the Cotswold mills." Many are the marks of distinction won by West of England firms at various exhibitions. One firm alone in the Stroud valley is in possession of twenty-four gold medals and highest awards.

The main difficulty which the West of England manufacturers have had to face during the past thirty years has been, not competition in their own special line of goods, but a restricted demand for those goods due to changes in fashion.

They have been hit more particularly, as has been pointed out in the *Times* article, by the widespread substitution of worsted for woollen fabrics and by the popular demand for a great variety of fancy patterns rather than for plain cloths. How general has been the change from woollens to worsteds is shown by the fact that since 1889 the number of worsted spindles in the United Kingdom has increased 22 per cent., while the number of woollen spindles has decreased 16 per cent.

Equally far reaching is the effect of the change in fashion, which demands in woollens as well as in worsteds a great variety of fancy patterns rather than plain cloths.

Forty years ago there was probably not one fancy loom in Gloucestershire. In one of the more progressive Stroud mills, which now turns out tweeds, suitings, and fancy vestings in manifold variety of colour and design, may be seen patterns of the only style of fancy cloth made in the mill thirty years ago—an uninteresting mixture of black and grey, or two dark shades of grey, the warp of one the weft of the other. At that time the many thriving

* "The Woollen and Worsted Industries." J. H. Clapham, Professor of Economics. Methuen & Co.

mills of the district flourished almost entirely on the demand for plain cloths. In 1871, Mr. Charles Playne, a local manufacturer, was able to say, in a lecture delivered at Nailsworth, that "the cloths made in this immediate neighbourhood at the present day consist almost exclusively of plain broad black beavers, meltons, and doeskins." The same could accurately have been said of the Wiltshire industry.

At that time every self-respecting citizen who could afford a Sunday suit at all wore black broadcloth when he went to church or chapel. To-day a man so clad is noticeable among his fellows, seeming to step out of a bygone generation. Then a woollen superfine cloth was the regulation wear for men's evening dress; now dress suits are as a rule made of a fine napless worsted, and broadcloth (of a coarser quality) is reserved for waiters and livery servants. The demand for the old style of cloth would not now support one tithe of the mills that formerly throve upon it. It is only by making a great variety of goods that the present mills can continue to run successfully.

A fair market for cloths of traditional West of England quality is still provided by the Services. A great part of the blue and scarlet cloths for officers' uniforms is made in the Stroud valleys. Several firms take large Government contracts for black and navy superfine cloths and doeskins. Two have made a speciality of scarlets, hunters, and billiard cloths, which, as they are all woven white and dyed in the piece, cannot be worked on machinery used for wool-dyed materials, and require a mill or a distinct department reserved entirely for the purpose. These cloths take from three to four months to make, and are worth from 12s. to 25s. a yard, wholesale price. They are unrivalled for colour and finish, and at home easily hold the field; and scarlets made in the Cotswold mills have clothed the Royal Guards of European sovereigns.

But it is evident that for these very costly materials, required only for strictly limited purposes, there is no extensive market. Even those firms which have specialised in this class of cloth are obliged also to cater for a more general demand. The cheapest class of stuffs, however, they do not attempt to touch. They rarely make anything below 4s. a yard wholesale, and 6s. or 7s. is probably the average value of their goods, other than superfines and doeskins, which are more costly. The Gloucestershire manufacturers use neither shoddy nor cotton, but all pure wool, and their cheapest fabrics are made throughout with careful workmanship. Gloucestershire manufacturers maintain that it is undesirable to run the better and lower grades of stuff in one mill, and that to introduce the lower grades into the district at all would be fatal to their better-class trade; that workers trained to the one class of work are ruined for the other; that in the one case care and thoroughness, in the other case haste, are the main considerations, and that the two are incompatible. Consequently the West of England stands aloof from the great and growing market for the cheapest cloths provided by the large ready-made clothing factories all over the country. The two large clothing factories working at Stroud, next door to the cloth mills, are almost entirely supplied by Yorkshire, notably by the Colne Valley and by Dewsbury and Batley, with shoddy-mixed cloths ranging down to 1s. and 2s. the yard.

The West of England mills were built and equipped to produce plain goods of small variety but of high finish and value. To adapt them to modern requirements was no light task. Many of the mills were small concerns, run on a small capital. Under old conditions this arrangement was successful. But the buildings were in many cases too narrow and the floors not strong enough to carry the modern fast-power looms and other new and heavy machinery. Extensive rebuilding would have been neces-

sary, and this, together with the installation of new machinery, involved a larger outlay of capital than many of the firms could easily raise. Some manufacturers preferred to retire on the comfortable fortunes they had accumulated rather than to embark their capital on the costly and hazardous enterprise of revolutionising their business. Others attempted to continue working on the old lines, and these have, one by one, been obliged to close down. The greater part of their machinery, when offered for sale, has been found to be of too antiquated a pattern to find a purchaser, save as scrap-iron. The firms that survive and prosper to-day are those which have had the courage and the capital to make drastic changes, to enlarge or alter their premises, to introduce new machinery and keep it constantly renewed, to make a large variety of goods, and to adopt more strenuous methods in their commercial departments.

All these changes they have had to make in the face of severe competition. As long as they could afford to continue making only their own specialities they enjoyed a virtual monopoly. From the moment that they were obliged to turn from the old trade to other lines of business they came into fierce competition, in the better class of fancy woollens with Scotch, in the cheaper woollens and in worsteds with the West Riding manufacturers; competitors who had grown up with, had indeed to some extent created, the demand for fancy stuffs, and who therefore enjoyed the advantage of being first in the field.

When the various difficulties which the Gloucestershire manufacturers have had to face are taken into account, it is not astonishing that some of the weaker firms have gone to the wall, and it certainly speaks well for the vitality of the local industry that it has not only maintained intact its high reputation for West of England cloth properly so-called, but that several of the more important firms have built up, in face of severe competition, a good

and growing business in a great variety of the better and medium class of woollen and worsted goods.

The machinery and the customary organisation of the early stages of woollen and worsted manufacture are so entirely different that it would have been a herculean task for the Cotswold manufacturers successfully to build up a business in worsted spinning in face of the competition of the well-established Yorkshire combing and spinning mills. The Gloucestershire and Wiltshire mills, which more typically represent the West of England trade, and have always belonged essentially to the woollen branch of the industry, buy, usually from Yorkshire or from the Continent, the worsted thread which they are now compelled, to some extent, to weave.

With the Somerset industry the case is different. Ever since the days of the Flemish weavers whom Edward III. established at Taunton, the speciality of the Somerset industry has consisted in its serges, and these have from time immemorial been made with a worsted warp and a woollen weft. Consequently combing and worsted spinning have always been a regular branch of the Somersetshire industry, and it has been no very difficult matter to develop those departments in response to the increasing demand for worsted fabrics. Moreover, the Somersetshire industry is controlled by a smaller number of people, with a larger capital at their disposal, than is the case in the neighbouring counties, and it is undoubtedly easier for one large firm than for many small ones to effect changes in methods of production. The greater part of the Somersetshire industry is, as already mentioned, in the hands of one firm, a firm of old standing, varied experience, and unflagging enterprise. Their works are probably as well equipped as any in the kingdom, and they are constantly introducing new fabrics and new methods. The first fancy loom worked by the firm was introduced about twenty years ago; they now make literally thousands

of fresh ranges of patterns every year, besides maintaining their old reputation for serges. They take large Government contracts for serges for the War Office, Admiralty, Post Office, and Police, and make a great quantity of khaki both for our own and for foreign governments; and, among recent innovations, have built up a large trade in putties. Those Tariff Reform manufacturers of Stroud and Trowbridge, who maintain that Free Trade is ruining their industry, should remember that under the same fiscal system their neighbours of Wellington have, during the past forty years, increased the annual value of their sales by 80 per cent., the number of their employees by 85 per cent., and their wages' bill by over 220 per cent.; further, that a great part of their business consists in export trade to protected countries, and that the only rivals whom they fear, either at home or abroad, are their British competitors.

The West of England, in addition to the difficulties already alluded to, labours under yet another disadvantage in its competition with its rivals of the North. The Yorkshire manufacturers are, as a rule, more energetic than those of the West of England in the cultivation of markets, a matter of great importance in a trade in which there is almost no advertising. The success of a firm in securing customers often depends as much on the judgment and pushfulness of the selling representatives as on the quality of the goods offered. It is frequently admitted in the evidence given before the Tariff Commission that the English are inferior to their German competitors in the art of pushing their wares. Many West of England manufacturers have no doubt given too little care to this important matter. They may be handicapped to some extent by the lack of local opportunities of commercial training. Their rivals in the West Riding, situate within easy reach of the great industrial centres—Leeds, Bradford, Manchester—with their commercial schools and

technical colleges, certainly enjoy greater facilities for obtaining a good supply of trained men for their commercial departments.

It will be recognised that no one of the circumstances here enumerated which have contributed to the closing of mills in the West of England could have been either removed or modified by a protective tariff. They have been independent of any fiscal policy.

It is noteworthy that in France, within the protection of a high tariff, similar causes have produced exactly similar results. The smaller centres of the industry, and particularly those devoted to the woollen branch, have been severely injured by competition from the Roubaix-Tourcoing district, which may aptly be called the "West Riding" of France. There, as in this country, changes in fashion and changes in methods of production have favoured the worsted branch at the expense of the woollen, the chief centre of manufacture at the expense of the smaller and more scattered districts, the large manufacturer at the expense of the smaller.

The history of Elbœuf, in Normandy, an old centre of the woollen trade, is singularly analogous to that of the Cotswold district. Many mills have closed, and those surviving have been forced to revolutionise both their methods of production and their trade, to abandon their traditional specialities, to use worsted thread spun at Roubaix in place of the local woollen yarn, and to produce a miscellaneous assortment of stuffs somewhat resembling those made in the neighbourhood of Leeds. The President of the Elbœuf Chamber of Commerce, in giving evidence before the French Parliamentary Committee appointed to inquire into the state of the textile industries in 1904, made the following statement: "Twenty-five years ago we were 250 manufacturers. . . . We have been forced either to start large establishments or vanish. Those who had not the necessary capital have

vanished. . . . To-day there are but thirty-five concerns."

Sédan, the old seat of the fine woollen cloth manufacture, and a century ago the leading wool manufacturing district of France, has suffered a similar fate. Fournier and Rheims have also suffered. These were worsted districts, but accustomed to work the pure merino wools which the French have a peculiar skill in adapting to the worsted trade; they have failed to adapt themselves to the use of cross-bred wools and to the production of the cheaper fabrics now in vogue, and their trade is consequently declining. In France other causes, directly due to Protection, have aggravated the difficulties under which manufacturers have laboured; but these affect the whole industry. The present instances of marked decline in certain districts have been cited to show that, whether under Free Trade or Protection, any general change in fashion or in methods of production is bound to crush out of existence those mills which, from whatever reason, are unable to adapt themselves to the new order of things, and that no fiscal policy devised or devisable by man will ever prevent this natural sequence of cause and effect.

CHAPTER VIII

CONDITION OF THE WORKERS

UNDER Free Trade the condition of the workers has steadily and enormously improved. Their wages have risen, their hours of labour have been shortened, the prices of the goods they buy have fallen. The general standard

of comfort which they now enjoy is higher than it has been at any previous period.

WAGES

The testimony of all concerned—employers, managers, and wage-earners—agrees in pointing to a great rise in wages during the Free Trade period, and an appreciable rise during the past twenty or thirty years.

To ascertain the exact extent of the rise throughout the West of England industry is not possible, owing to the absence of any general wage statistics. The organisation of the work has varied so greatly at different times, with changes in the machinery used, and, further, the earnings of individual workers, the majority of whom are paid at piece-rates, vary so widely with their capacity and with the class of goods on which they are engaged that only an exhaustive official wage-census could ascertain the actual average earnings in each department at any given time.

But wherever a comparison between past and present wages is possible, it is clear that there has been a great improvement.

The most complete information obtainable on the subject is from the Wellington district, where Messrs. Fox Brothers & Co. have kept a careful record, covering a long series of years, of the average wages actually paid by the firm in various departments for a full week (exclusive of overtime). From these records, kindly lent by the firm, the following percentages have been compiled:—

RISE IN WAGES BETWEEN THE YEARS 1846 AND 1908.

Occupation	*Rise in Wages of 1908 over Wages of 1846* *Per cent.*
Sorters (Women)	218
Feeders (Women)	130
Worsted Spinners (Women)	82
Sorters (Men)..	131

RISE IN WAGES BETWEEN THE YEARS 1846 AND 1908 (*cont.*)

Occupation.	*Rise in Wages of 1908 over Wages of 1846* *Per cent.*
Dyers (Men)	152
Mule Spinners (Men)	57
Mechanics engaged about the Mills—	
Engine Cleaners	118
Fitters	80
Smiths	67
Carpenters	56
Masons	53

It will be noticed that in no case has the rise been less than 53 per cent., an addition of slightly more than half the original wage, that in several cases it has been over 100 per cent. (that is, the wage has doubled), and in one case, that of the women sorters, the wage has more than trebled.

Where we have been able to take ten-year averages the result is substantially the same. Taking the average for the years 1849-58 and 1899-1908, the wages of dyers (men) and of worsted spinners (women) have both risen by 107 per cent.; they have rather more than doubled.

For dressers and finishers, weavers and menders, the records do not extend over so long a period, but they show very plainly that the upward movement has been maintained throughout the period of Free Trade, and continues at the present day. Comparing the average for the years 1864-68 and for the years 1904-8, we find that the wages of dressers and finishers (men) have risen by just upon 85 per cent. in forty years.

For weavers and menders we can only give a comparison extending over the last twenty years. We give this in five-yearly averages to show how constant the rise has been, slackening only during the period of the South African War. The average wages of the last five years are taken as the standard, those for the previous period being reckoned as percentages of that figure.

	Weavers 1 Loom	Weavers 2 Looms	Menders and Fine Drawers
1884–8	85	64	65
1889–93	91	71	77
1894–8	99	81	81
1899–1903	95–8	92	82
1904–8	100	100	100

In twenty years there has been a rise of 17 per cent. for the one-loom weavers, 56 per cent. for the two-loom weavers, and 53 per cent. for the menders and fine drawers. At Wellington, as already mentioned, the majority of weavers now work two looms. They earn half as much again as they did twenty years ago.

It is not possible to give such exact particulars for other districts, and it may well be that the improvement in the position of the workers at Wellington has been greater than has been the case in some other quarters where the industry has been less prosperous. But all the evidence obtainable points to a substantial rise in wages throughout the industry, and particularly in the wages of women and girls, who form a majority of the workers in the cloth mills.

In the days of Protection, and even as late as the 'fifties, women in the Gloucestershire mills earned 5s. to 7s. a week for work at which they would now earn 10s. to 12s.

Sir William Marling, long connected with the well-known firm established by his father, Sir Samuel Marling, estimates that in 1839 women wool-pickers, spinners, and burlers (those who remove knots from the woven cloth), earned 6s. a week; warpers 7s. Five or six shillings is the rate of women's wages (other than weavers) mentioned by the older men still working in the mills as common within their own memory. We shall not be far wrong in naming 11s. as the present equivalent.

In the spinning department the wages actually paid by one representative firm in the 'fifties were 8s. or 9s.

to the head women, and 4s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. to girls of from fourteen to twenty years of age. The same firm now pays for the same work from 8s. to 15s.; the average is probably about 11s., or nearly 80 per cent. higher than fifty years ago.*

The wages of warpers and of women in the mending departments seem, as a rule, to have risen in nearly the same proportion. Women who feed the machinery in the preparing and carding rooms now earn 8s. to 10s. The greater part of this work, in the days of Protection, was done by little children for 2s. and 3s. a week.

Among the women workers the weaver is able to earn the highest wage; and about one-half of the women and girls employed in the mills are weavers. The work is paid by the piece, and a clever worker can sometimes earn as much as 18s. a week, but this is exceptional; 12s. to 15s. is a very usual wage in the Stroud valleys. The average wage earned by weavers in one of the principal Stroud mills is 15s. It is more difficult to make a comparison of wages over a long period in the weaving than in any other departments, as the change from home work to factory work took place more recently, and completely altered the conditions of the work. The hand-loom weavers were in general men; the power looms have from the first been worked mainly, in Gloucestershire entirely, by women. The hand-loom weaver usually worked at home; he supplied his own loom, paid for the rent, heat, and lighting of his work-room, was obliged to fetch the yarn from the mill, to beam his own warp, and to carry the woven cloth back to the mill, which was often at a great distance from his home. It is said that in 1839 the average weekly earnings of a weaver working in his own home or in the shop

* In the Gloucestershire mills, contrary to the custom of other districts, the mules are operated by women, under the superintendence of a foreman, who overlooks the work of several pair of mules, and who is paid from 30s. to 35s. a week.

of a master weaver were under 7s., and that in the 'fifties they probably did not much exceed from 10s. to 12s.* In about 1870, when the hand-loom weaver was becoming very scarce, he sometimes received, if a hard worker, about 20s. a week; 30s. to 40s. were the rates paid for a piece with a 70-yards' warp (to finish about 54 yards long), which would take about a fortnight to weave. The expenses already alluded to had to be paid out of this sum. The hours of labour were at the weaver's own discretion, and were usually in excess of the factory hours. To-day his daughters earn 12s. to 15s. for a week of fifty-five and a half hours, and have no working expenses to pay. Their wages per piece have not materially altered during the past thirty years, but they can earn more; the looms are faster; there are fewer stoppages, and more help is given in the weaving sheds, so that the weaver suffers less interruption in her work.

In Gloucestershire the wages of women appear to be slightly above the average for the West of England. The official report recently published on wages in the textile trades, based on returns covering about 44 per cent. of those engaged in the industry, gives 12s. 6d. as the average full-time wage of weavers in the West of England, 11s. 3d. as the average for all women over eighteen (including weavers), and 8s. 6d. for girls under eighteen.†

The wages of foremen have increased substantially, and without exception; from 30s. to 35s. is a usual wage in the Stroud valleys; a few men in leading positions of responsibility earn £2 and £3 and even more. The official report for the West of England generally, gives 27s. 10d. as the average wage for foremen and "assistant foremen"

* Paper on the Woollen Industry of Gloucestershire read by Sir W. Marling before the Stroud Textile School, Oct. 5th, 1908

† The returns are from Stroud and Wotton-under-Edge, Trowbridge and Chippenham, Wellington and Bath, Liskeard, Tavistock and Ashburton, and Witney.

(tuners and overlookers) in the weaving department, and 33s. 3d. in all other departments.

The wages of men other than foremen have also risen; but they vary so considerably in different districts and departments that it is not possible to give a general comparison. In the Stroud valleys mechanics engaged about the mills—masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, enginemen—earn nearly, if not quite, double the amount that they earned under Protection. Where, in the 'forties, they earned from 15s. to 16s., they now earn from 27s. to 30s. The ordinary operatives engaged in the dyeing, fulling, dressing, and finishing departments seem, in Gloucestershire, to have had the smallest share in the general improvement. Their wages to-day are not much higher than those for agricultural labour in the same neighbourhood, ranging between 15s. and 18s. But even here there has been a rise of at least 25 per cent. to 30 per cent. during the past half century. And whereas in the Gloucestershire mills women's wages appear to be rather above, the wages of the ordinary mill-men appear to be rather below the average for the West of England, certainly below the average for Somersetshire.

GENERAL CONDITION OF WORKERS

But the general improvement in the condition of the workers is only partly measured by the rise in their money wages, for while these have steadily risen, prices have steadily fallen. The workman now receives more shillings in return for his work; he also receives more goods in return for each shilling. Bread, groceries, provisions, light, clothes, and many household goods are all cheaper than formerly, and cheaper largely on account of Free Trade. Meat is not much, if any, cheaper, but the price of meat was a matter of comparative indifference to the mass of the people when they could afford to buy it only as an occasional luxury. It is told of a sack manufacturer at Dursley

that he was obliged to put bitter-aloes in the flour and water used to size the thread to prevent the starving women workers from eating it. Fifty years ago the women would come to the mills barefoot and ragged, with faces worn and haggard by privation. To-day they come well nourished and well dressed and in general with a happy countenance. There are men still working in the Stroud valleys, men between sixty and seventy years of age, who well remember the days when their breakfast consisted of bread and water with a pinch of salt; when "giblets" were the only form of meat they ever tasted; when their scantily furnished homes were lighted with nothing better than a farthing rush-light; and when they were forced to go afield at an age at which their grandchildren are still kept at school, and to work from dawn till dark for a pittance of 1s. 6d. or 2s. a week. These are men who are in no danger of voting for Tariff Reform.

CHAPTER IX

PROBABLE EFFECTS OF TARIFF REFORM

In the preceding chapters it has been shown that, whereas in the heyday of Protection the woollen trade throughout the country was rapidly declining, manufacturers were failing, mills were closing down, unemployment was rife, and workers were subject to the greatest destitution and suffering, a great impetus was given to the industry by the introduction of Free Trade, that the subsequent history of the industry has been one of rapid and continuous ex-

pansion, and that if in the West of England this expansion has not kept pace with that in the West Riding, this has been due to causes independent of any Fiscal Policy.

At the same time we freely acknowledge that the existence of protective tariffs does to some extent limit our markets abroad, and we have now to consider the assertion of the Tariff Reformer that a resort on our part to protective tariffs would break down the foreign tariffs and increase our markets.

Here, again, we are not left without the light of experience to guide us.

What has been the success in beating down opposition tariffs attained by those countries which are armed with that power of bargaining coveted for us, and in what is their position in the markets of the world superior to ours?

For generations protected nations have been bargaining with one another for tariff reductions, with the result that there is no important market into which our protected rivals enter on better terms than do our own manufacturers; while, on the other hand, there are important markets into which our manufacturers, as a direct result of our Free Trade Policy, are admitted on more favourable terms than some of their leading protected rivals. British goods enter the United States at a lower rate of duty than French goods; they enter France at a lower rate of duty than American goods.

These and similar advantages we should forfeit on the day that we adopted the policy of Retaliation. The probability is that adverse tariffs, instead of being reduced, as Tariff Reformers unjustifiably assume, would, as actually occurred when the Corn Laws were in operation, be yet further raised against us; and that, in common with other exporters, our woollen manufacturers, whether of the West of England or of the North, would find it harder and not easier to dispose of their goods in protected markets.

Many of the more level-headed among the West Country manufacturers know full well, whatever their party politics, that they have little to hope for in the matter of better markets abroad from a policy of Retaliation. They recognise, moreover, that the imposition of a general tariff would injure them in a twofold manner; their cost of production would be raised, while the purchasing power of their home customers would be reduced by the enhanced price of the luxuries and the necessities of life.

The taxes on food and other necessaries would seriously affect the workpeople. Their wages to-day are barely more than suffice for a decent supply of the simple necessaries of life; any considerable rise in prices would render those wages insufficient. The manufacturer must, therefore, either raise wages in order to keep the purchasing power of his workpeople at the level of to-day, or suffer their efficiency to be impaired by privation and discontent. In either case his cost of production would be increased.

He would also, under a system of Tariff Reform, have to meet a rise in the price of many things which enter into his mill, of which machinery, dye-stuffs, and worsted yarns are among the more important. The main part of the dyes used in the Gloucestershire mills are German, less often because they are cheaper than because they are better than any others. Worsted yarns are also frequently bought from the Continent. Under Protection the price of these would be raised by a tax, and Yorkshire spinners would take advantage of the situation to demand a higher price for their yarns also. The machinery used in the mills is mainly British, as it is generally found to be more reliable in quality than foreign machinery. Manufacturers, however, frequently buy for trial some new machine brought out in the United States, Germany, Belgium, or even Austria. If satisfactory, these are usually, before long, copied by British makers. A tax,

even of 10 per cent., on foreign machines would, in many cases, where these machines are of any great value, tend to deter manufacturers from promptly availing themselves of the inventions of their foreign competitors. Further, the duties already seriously proposed by the Tariff Commission on pig-iron, steel, wire, and other partly manufactured iron and steel goods must tend to raise the price of British-made machines.

The cost of building also would be raised under Tariff Reform, which would, presumably, impose duties on cement, glass, slates, paint, doors, window frames, girders, and other "manufactured" building materials, and, if Mr. Wyndham's counsel were followed, even upon timber. These duties would represent more taxes on the capital outlay of the manufacturer whenever he required to repair, alter, or extend his buildings.

There would also be the grave danger of a tax on wool. It is true Tariff Reformers still, as a rule, declare themselves in favour of the free admission of raw materials. But what are raw materials? Is not wool as truly the manufactured product of the farmer's industry as leather is the manufactured product of the tanner? Yet the one is the spinner's, the other is the shoemaker's raw material. One thing is certain. Systems of Protection invariably extend beyond the limits laid down by their original founders; and the policy of Colonial Preference, if ever established as a part of our fiscal system, would, it is almost certain, extend from food-stuffs to raw materials. The desire for trading privileges is, as Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman truly said, a contagious disease; and the sheep owners of Australia and New Zealand and lumber masters of Canada would be ill-content until the favours granted to their farming neighbours had been extended to themselves. It is argued that Australasia will never ask for a preference on wool because she already holds first place among wool-exporting nations. During the

past five years about five-sixths of our imports of lamb's and sheep's wool came from within the British Empire; between five-eighths and two-thirds of the total came from Australasia. But our imports of South American wools, though still but a small proportion of our total supply, rose during this period from 37,000,000 lbs. to 74,000,000 lbs. (exclusive of wool which we bought indirectly through Europe), and they are likely to increase in the future. This menace of future competition would be quite sufficient to whet the appetite for preference of Australasian wool exporters. It is true that the West of England mills seldom spin any South American wools; they use mainly Australian merino, with occasionally a little of the finest German wool for the costliest cloths. But a tax on the South American wool used by the North Country mills would stimulate the demand for Australian wool all over the kingdom, and force up the price.

Protective duties would not only increase the cost of production; they would also decrease the purchasing power of the consumer. Taxes on corn, meat, and dairy produce and on all manufactured articles must inevitably raise the cost of living. The great bulk of the consuming public, not only the wage-earners, but also the great mass of the middle classes, would at once try to effect economies in their expenditure in whatever directions appeared to cause them the least privation. Accustomed to a certain standard of appearance in dress, as in other matters, they would endeavour to obtain the same outward appearance at the expense of the real quality of their purchases. The result would be to force the demand for cloth and other woollen stuffs more and more on to the lower grades.

From the West of England manufacturers' point of view this simply means to drive the trade more and more into the hands of his Yorkshire rivals. For the West of England industry, as already shown, is not adapted to the making of cheap stuffs.

Tariff Reformers will argue that their policy would improve the home market for home manufacturers by excluding or diminishing foreign competition. But it is universally acknowledged that in the fine woollen cloths which are the speciality of the West there is no foreign competition; and in the better and medium class worsteds, fancy woollens, covert coatings, etc., the only serious competition is from rivals in our own country.

The foreign cloths and stuffs that come into this country are, in the main, of two kinds: Specialities, mainly in ladies' dress goods, which are bought on account of their superior dyes, character and quality, rather than on account of their price, which we do not, and apparently cannot, make, and which would therefore continue to arrive in face of any moderate tariff; and, on the other hand, a great variety of cheap stuffs, ladies' mantle cloths, and other miscellaneous cheap fabrics, which come mainly from Germany, and undersell even the goods produced around Dewsbury and Batley and in the Colne Valley. But in woollens and worsteds for men's wear, and particularly in the higher qualities, the amount of foreign competition is negligible. In the evidence published by the Tariff Commission we read: "The principal imports of woollens into this country consist of low goods," "Goods imported into this country are made from inferior material," "As a rule cheap rubbish," "Similar in appearance, but not equal in value," and countless other statements to the same effect. These cheap goods can be sold at a lower price than we can produce them, owing (so the witnesses before the Tariff Commission constantly assert) to the lower wages and longer hours of labour obtaining on the Continent and to the policy pursued by our Protectionist rivals of keeping up prices against their own countrymen in order to sell cheap abroad. But everywhere our manufacturers of high-class wares say: "There is no foreign competition in our class of goods."

It is true that the cheap goods indirectly compete with the better-class goods. They help to clothe the British public, and manufacturers complain of increased home competition in good-class wares, due to foreign competition in the lowest grades, inasmuch as this competition has obliged some British firms formerly engaged on the cheaper grades to enter the market with a somewhat better class of goods. Whereby the consumer gains; in that not only the cheapest goods, but also the better class of goods are become more abundant and accessible. Women of the poorer class, who buy the cheap German stuffs, buy them because they want them, often because they cannot afford to buy anything dearer; if Yorkshire could make these particular stuffs at the same value as Germany she would do so to-day. The effect of the rise in prices caused by protective duties would be to render the masses less, and not more, capable of buying more expensive qualities.

The net result of Protection would therefore be, not a general increase in business for the woollen industries, but dearer clothes for everybody, and particularly for those who can least afford to buy them.

CHAPTER X

RISE OF OTHER INDUSTRIES

There is one other matter connected with our subject with which we would briefly deal.

There has, as already admitted, been a marked decline in the number of hands engaged in the West of England

woollen mills. Yet the general prosperity of the woollen manufacturing districts has substantially improved. The economic progress of these districts affords, indeed, an effective illustration of a truth which the Tariff Reformer apparently fails to realise: that where labour is set free from one class of work by the introduction of labour-saving methods—whether by the use of new machinery which enables one man to do the work formerly done by ten, or by an extension of trade which enables us to obtain from abroad in exchange for one day's labour goods which cost us two days' labour to make at home—whatever be the form of economy which releases labour from one occupation, it will at the same time release the capital which formerly paid the wages of that labour, and that capital will be set free to provide employment in other forms of industry.

In the woollen trade, as has already been shown, the past fifty years have witnessed extraordinary progress in the development of labour-saving machinery, a progress which probably alone suffices to account for the decline in the number of hands engaged in the industry in the West of England.

We do not suggest that, by this increased use of machinery, which has dispensed with so much labour in the cloth-mills, the capital of mill owners has been set at liberty actually and directly to employ in other trades the hands which have been released from the woollen industry. The mill-owners have had to buy machinery; they are also obliged to employ more people than formerly in the selling branch of their business; they have raised the wages of the operatives employed in the mills; they have to some extent reduced the price of their goods. In these several ways the capital withdrawn from directly paying wages to hands no longer required in the cloth-mills has increased the demand for labour in other directions, and has increased the purchasing power both of the mill-

operatives whose wages have risen and of all those buyers of woollen goods who pay rather less for their cloth than formerly.

In a similar manner capital released from other industries by the progress of labour-saving methods of production has given employment to the workers formerly engaged in the cloth-mills. These workers have not, as Tariff Reformers would imply, remained without employment. They have been absorbed by the growth of other industries, and many are to-day engaged in industries in which they earn far higher wages than they ever earned in the cloth trade. A large number, moreover, have found employment in industries which have grown up under Free Trade, which owe their rise and prosperity largely to Free Trade, and which would inevitably be injured by any tampering with that great system.

In the Stroud Valleys and the adjoining country are many buildings, once cloth-mills, now devoted to the service of other flourishing industries.

Machines of various kinds, carpets, hosiery, pins and hairpins, brushes, umbrella fittings, ledgers and account books, catalogues and other printed matter, are among the many wares which are fashioned to-day within walls which once echoed to the clickety-clack of the loom.

Most notable among the rising industries of the locality are the various engineering works, which now rank second only to the cloth-mills from the point of view of the number of hands employed, and which far excel the cloth-mills in the average level of wages earned by the employees.

At Dursley upwards of five hundred hands are employed by Messrs. R. A. Lister & Co. in the manufacture of cream separators and other dairy machinery, and also in the Dursley-Pedersen Cycle Works. Some of the spacious workshops belonging to this firm cover the sites of four cloth-mills of olden days. The business was started

about forty years ago with one or two men, the premises then occupied costing only £6 a year for rent and taxes. Between 1870-80 a staff of about forty men was employed. It has been since that period, so often cited by Tariff Reformers as the point at which British industrial prosperity reached its zenith, that this modest undertaking has rapidly expanded until it holds a leading place in the manufacture of dairy machinery. A large new workshop has only this year been erected to meet the needs of a steadily growing business.

The greater part of the machines made at Dursley are sent abroad, mainly to continental markets. France, Belgium, Germany and Austria-Hungary are all large customers, and a promising business is now being done with Southern Russia; Canada is also a good customer. In the majority of these countries a moderate duty is levied on imported dairy machinery; yet the British machines enter into successful competition with those made behind the protective Tariffs. They are made from untaxed materials, while the foreign manufacturers have, in many cases, to pay duties upon the raw and semi-manufactured materials which they require.

One point in connection with this trade is especially noteworthy as illustrating the futility and danger of the policy of Retaliation. Under the French tariff the duty on British separators is less than half the duty on American separators. Why? Because we offer a free market to French goods while America meets them with a high Protective tariff. And so British separators can easily undersell American separators in the important markets of France, and there are men in Dursley earning good wages to-day as a direct result of that circumstance.

Near Stroud are several smaller engineering works of various kinds. All have either come into being or grown from insignificant beginnings during the Free Trade period. One firm, engaged mainly in the manufacture of

gas-engines, took over in 1894 a small business employing some forty hands; to-day about three hundred are employed. Seventy-five per cent. of the goods made by this firm are exported; they are sold all over Europe in spite of foreign tariffs. Next door to these ironworks, on the premises and under the direction of one of the principal, and perhaps the most progressive, of the Stroud Valley woollen manufacturers, Messrs. Apperly, Curtis & Co., a brassworks and foundry have been started within recent years, where a flourishing business in brass valves and other machinery fittings is rapidly growing. Under the same roof some two hundred hands, mainly boys and girls, are engaged in making umbrella furniture. A mile or so further up the valley, on the banks of the canal, an old cloth-mill is devoted to the building of steel boats and launches for service on the rivers of South America.

These few examples far from complete the list of engineering works which now thrive within a stone's throw or actually upon the site of disused cloth-mills in the Stroud valleys. Sons of old hand-loom weavers are earning better wages as mechanics than their fathers ever earned at their trade; and many a man who was himself but a few years ago earning 16s. a week as a mill-hand, or 15s. a week upon the land, is to-day earning 25s. to 30s., and even more, in foundry or fitting-shop. Large numbers have been thus able to improve their fortunes without leaving their native hills and valleys, where they enjoy the great advantages of low house-rents and good gardens, and of walking to and from their work through pure air, green fields and fair, open country.

Within a few miles of this district, moreover, close under the foot-hills of the Cotswold range, and at the head of the Berkely and Gloucester Canal, lies the town and port of Gloucester, whose growing industries and trade offer year by year a constantly augmenting demand for labour. The flourishing import trade in grain and

timber employs many hundreds of men on the canal and at the docks. A departure from the policy of Free Trade would inevitably make many of these men idle.

The population of Gloucester increased from 32,000 to 58,000 during the latter half of the nineteenth century. During that time a number of works were established in the town, among which the engineering works are by far the most important. The Gloucester railway waggon works, which cover over twenty acres of ground and alone employ nearly two thousand men, were started about fifty years ago. Their history has been one of steady expansion. Their trade is almost entirely an export trade, for the great English railway companies have their own waggon works, and only the smaller companies occasionally buy from outside firms. The business consists in the main in making rolling stock for India, China, South America, Egypt, South Africa. This important business could gain nothing from Tariff Reform; we do not buy foreign railway waggons; on the other hand, Tariff Reform, by raising the cost of materials and machinery, must undermine the advantages enjoyed by our manufacturers to-day in their competition with protected rivals in neutral markets. To the Gloucester waggon works the injury would be serious. Another rapidly growing engineering establishment, that of Messrs. Fielding & Platt, employs some five hundred men; in 1866 the present firm took over a business employing thirty men. Forty per cent. of the goods now made in these works are exported. Several hundred men find employment at various other foundries and engine-works in Gloucester.

It is very generally admitted that none of these engineering works suffer to an appreciable extent from foreign competition in the home market. Little or no benefit could possibly accrue to them through Protection. They would all suffer as buyers of iron and steel when the price of those articles was controlled by a tariff-protected trust. It has been under Free Trade, and largely

due to Free Trade, that many of these prosperous works have grown up, offering an opening for highly-paid employment to many a man who, by reason of those industrial changes which are the essential accompaniment of progress, is no longer wanted in his original trade.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown in the preceding pages:—

(1) That under the *régime* of Protection the West of England cloth trade was in a state of acute depression, and the workers in the industry in a state of pitiable distress.

(2) That the condition of the workers has steadily and enormously improved throughout the period of Free Trade.

(3) That the diminution in the numbers employed in the industry during the past half-century has been mainly, if not wholly, due to the introduction and improvement of labour-saving machinery, which has enabled fewer hands earning higher wages to turn out an equal quantity of goods at a lower price. Thus both labour and money have been set free for the supply and purchase of other goods, and in fact other industries have sprung up, often on the very sites of the old mills.

(4) That where workers have lost their employment through the closing down of mills, this has, in general, been due to home, and not to foreign competition, and would not, therefore, have been averted by Protection.

(5) That, judging both by the past and by obvious presumptions, Tariff Reform would in no way improve the position of the West of England cloth mills either in the home or the export trade, while it would seriously interfere with other forms of industry which have grown up under a Free Trade *régime,* and would increase the cost of living to all, and to the workers without possible compensation.

Tariff Reform would, indisputably, benefit a few wealthy, powerful and favoured individuals. By setting up obstructions between their customers and their com-

petitors it would confer upon them the monopolist's licence to plunder his fellows; for the man who is enabled to obtain more for his goods than they would be worth in an open market is thereby enabled to rob his customers.

It is unlikely that the West of England woollen manufacturers would be among those to share the plunder.

It is certain that the operatives, in common with the great mass of their fellow-workers in other trades and occupations, would pay the price.

The interest of the worker lies in obtaining the greatest possible amount of the necessaries and comforts of life in return for his labour. This he can only do where freedom of trade encourages the most economical and the most profitable employment of labour. As we stated in the opening pages of this paper, the prosperity of a country cannot be tested by the state of any particular industry, but by the general wealth, power and happiness which the community enjoys as a result of the labours of the whole community and of the exchange of goods and services between itself and the world at large. Judged by this standard, there can be no doubt as to the effects of Free Trade upon the industrial districts of the West of England.

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